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BY

P. A. DE ALARCON.

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THE THREE-CORNERED HAT

I.

CONCERNING WHEN THE AFFAIR HAPPENED.

THE present century, now in its old age, was in its infancy at the time our story commences. The precise year is unknown ; all that is certain is that it was after the year 1804, and before the year 1808.

Don Carlos IV. of Bourbon, was still reigning in Spain—"by the grace of God," according to Spanish coins, but by an oversight or special grace of Bonaparte, according to French bulletins. The remaining European sovereigns, descended from Louis XIV. of France, had already lost their crowns (and the chief of them his head) in the violent storm that had been raging over the old world since 1789.

The unique position of Spain did not end here. The soldier of the Revolution, the son of an obscure Corsican advocate, the victor of Rivoli, of the Pyramids, of Marengo, and a hundred other battles, had just assumed the crown of Charlemagne, after having completely transformed the continent of Europe creating and suppressing nations, effacing frontiers, originating dynasties, and changing the forms, names, situation, customs and even the style of dress

of the countries through which he passed on his war-horse like an animated earthquake, or, as the Northern Powers called him, the Antichrist. Nevertheless, our fathers (God keep them in His Holy Glory!), far from hating or fearing him, took delight in reading and musing over his remarkable deeds, just as if he were the hero of a book of chivalry or were performing feats in another planet; and never suspected that he might one day come in their direction to attempt similar atrocities to those he had perpetrated in France, Germany, Italy, and other countries.

Once a week, or twice at the outside, the post from Madrid arrived at most of the principal towns of the Peninsula, bringing a stray copy of the "*Gaceta*" (which, by the way, was not published daily); and by its means, the chief inhabitants were able to ascertain (assuming that the Gazette referred to the particular event) whether there was a state more or less on the other side of the Pyrenees, whether a battle had just been fought, wherein six or eight Kings and Emperors figured, or whether Napoleon was at Milan, Brussels or Warsaw. For the rest, our ancestors were living on in the old Spanish fashion, desperately slow, firmly attached to their musty customs, in peace and in the grace of God, with their Inquisition and their friars, their picturesque inequality before the law, their privileges, charters and personal exemptions, and their lack of all liberty, municipal or political; governed simultaneously by worthy Bishops and powerful Corregidor (whose respective jurisdictions were not very easy to define, for one and all interfered in temporal as well as eternal matters), and paying tithes, first fruits, excise duties, subsidies, alms, forced loans, rents, dues, capitations, royal thirds, salt and poll taxes, scot and lot, and fifty other tributes, the nomenclature of which is of no particular moment.

And here is an end of all that our present history has to do

with the military and political affairs of this particular epoch; for our only object in recalling what was then happening in the world is in order to dwell upon the fact that in the year of which we are speaking (let us suppose it to be 1805) the *ancien régime* still flourished in Spain in all ranks of public and private life, as if in the midst of so many innovations and subversions, the Pyrenees had been converted into another Great Wall of China.

II.

HOW PEOPLE LIVED THEN.

IN Andalucia for instance (for what you are about to hear happened in a town of that province) persons of condition continued to rise very early; hearing matins at the Cathedral, even if it was not "Dia de precepto"; breakfasting at nine o'clock on a fried egg and a cup of chocolate with slips of toast; dining between one and two o'clock off two courses, if there was game, and if not, off one only; taking a siesta after eating, and then walking in the country; going at evensong between the lights to their respective parish churches, drinking another cup of chocolate at evening prayers (this time with biscuits), and the most aristocratic attending the evening reception of the Corregidor, the Dean or some other dignitary, residing in the town; retiring home at curfew time; closing the inner door before the ringing of the *queda*; supping on salad and stew, if fresh anchovies were not in, and immediately afterwards going to bed with their wives, not without first having the bed well warmed during at least nine months of the year.

Happy time that, when our country remained in quiet and peaceful possession of all the cobwebs, the dust, the moths, the ceremonies, the beliefs, the traditions, the uses and

abuses sanctified by centuries! Most happy time that when there existed in human society, a variety of classes, prejudices, and customs. Most happy time that, I say, especially for the poets, who found in every corner a legend, a tale, a comedy, a drama, a novel, a farce, an interlude, a sacred allegory, or an epic instead of this prosaic uniformity and stern realism which the great French Revolution has bequeathed to us.

Most happy time if — But we have already had enough of generalities and circumlocutions, so let us boldly enter upon the history of the Three-cornered Hat.

III.

“DO UT DES.”

At the time when this history commences, there was in the neighbourhood of the city of — a magnificent flour mill (which exists no longer), situated about a quarter of a league from the town, in a delicious spot between a hill covered with cherry trees and a fertile orchard, that served as the bank (and sometimes the bed) of a treacherous and intermittent river.

For various and divers reasons this mill had been for some time the favourite resort of the most distinguished idlers of the aforesaid city. In the first place a carriage road, somewhat less impassable than others in the vicinity, led to it. Secondly, there was a paved space in front of the mill, canopied over by an enormous vine, beneath which the air could be comfortably enjoyed in summer and the sun in winter, thanks to the alternate sprouting and falling of the leaves. Thirdly, the miller was always very respectful, very discreet, and very smart, and possessed, moreover, what are

called winning manners; obsequiously waiting upon the great gentlemen who honoured him with an evening visit, offering them whatever the season produced; now green beans, now ripe cherries, now fresh lettuces without seasoning, and very good when accompanied by cakes; now melons, now grapes off the very vine which served them as a canopy; now *rosetus* of maize, if it was winter, and roasted chestnuts, almonds, and nuts, and from time to time, on very cold afternoons, a draught of wine (within the house and close to the fire), to which at Easter was added a fritter or butter-cake, or a slice of ham.

"So the miller was rich, or, if not, his visitors were very inconsiderate," my readers will say.

Neither the one nor the other. The miller owned only a small piece of land, and these gentlemen were delicacy and pride personified. But at a time when fifty and more different taxes were paid to the Church and the State, a rustic so well informed as the one in question, risked little by having gained the goodwill of magistrates, canons, friars, notaries, and other great personages. And there were not lacking envious persons who said that Uncle Lucas (for so the miller was called) saved a good round sum yearly through welcoming these people to his house and regaling them with whatever he possessed.

"Your honour will, I'm sure, give me an old door of the house you have just pulled down," he would say to one. "Your lordship" (he would say to another) "will, I know, grant a rebate on the subsidy, the market tax, or the rates." "Your reverence will let me pick a few mulberry leaves from the convent orchard for my silk worms." "Your worship will grant me permission to bring away a few faggots from the hill." "Your paternity will give me, I hope, a card permitting me to cut a little timber in the pine grove."

"This year I cannot pay the poll-tax." "I hope that the lawsuit may be decided in my favour." "To day I have given a fellow a few cuffs, and I think he ought to be sent to prison for provoking me to it." "Can you lend me your mule? Has your honour more than you need of this thing? Have you any use for that? Shall you require your cart to-morrow? It could be sent on by the donkey."

And these solicitations were repeated every hour, meeting always with the generous reply, "Certainly," or, "As you like." So you see Uncle Lucas was not on the road to ruin.

IV.

A WOMAN SEEN FROM WITHOUT.

THE last, and possibly the most powerful reason that the great personages of the city had for frequenting the mill of an afternoon was that the clergy and the laity, from the Lord Bishop and his honour the Corregidor downwards (for neither disdained to visit the place) were able to contemplate at their ease one of the most beautiful, most graceful, and most admirable works that had ever proceeded from the hands of the Almighty. This work was the Señá Frasquita.

I will begin by explaining that Frasquita, the legitimate wife of Uncle Lucas, was a good woman, and that all the illustrious visitors of the mill knew her to be so. I can say more; not one of them gave indications of regarding her with concupiscent eyes, or with sinful intention. They admired her, certainly, and occasionally paid her gallant attentions (before her husband, of course), the clergy as well as the gentry, the canons as well as the magistrates; regarding her as a prodigy of beauty that honoured its Maker, and as a very

devil for fun and coquetry, capable of making merry the most melancholy hearts.

"She is a beautiful creature," was the usual expression of the most virtuous prelate. "She is an antique Greek statue," observed a very learned Advocate, a correspondent of the Academy of History. "She is the true counterpart of Eve," broke out the Prior of the Franciscans. "She is a royal girl," exclaimed the Colonel of militia. "She is a serpent, a siren, a demon," added the Corregidor. "But she is a good woman, an angel, a very child in innocence," were the words they all wound up with on returning from the mill, filled with grapes and nuts, to their own dull and gloomy hearths.

This child in innocence, that is to say, Frasquita, was just upon thirty. She was upwards of five Spanish feet in height, and stout in proportion, or perhaps stouter than corresponded to her height. She seemed a colossal Niobe, who had not borne children; a sort of female Hercules; a Roman matron like many still to be seen in the Trastevere. But what was most remarkable in her was the mobility, the lightness, the animation, the grace of her massiveness. For a statue, according to the comparison of the Academician, monumental repose was wanting. She bent herself like a reed, turned about like a weathercock, danced like a top. Her face was still more expressive, and therefore less sculptural. It was gracefully enlivened by five dimples; two on one cheek; a third on the other; the fourth, which was very small, near the left corner of her laughing lips, and the last, very large, in the middle of her rounded chin. Add to this her roguish wiles, her gracious nods and winks, and the various movements of her head which accompanied her conversation, and you will form some idea of that face full of wit and beauty, and redolent of health and joy.

Neither Frasquita, nor Uncle Lucas, were Andalucians; she was from Navarra, and he from Murcia. He had come to the city near which they resided at the age of fifteen, partly in the capacity of page, partly in that of servant to the Bishop who immediately preceded the one we have already referred to. He was educated by his master for the Church, and with that object, and in order that he might have proper maintenance, the Bishop bequeathed to him the mill; but Lucas, who at the death of his Most Illustrious patron had only taken minor orders, hung up his clerical vestments forthwith, and became a soldier, being more anxious to see the world and meet with adventures than to say mass or grind corn.

In 1793 he went through the campaign in the western Pyrenees as orderly to General Don Ventura Caro; was present at the storming of Castillo Piñon, and remained a long time in the northern provinces, where ultimately he received his discharge. In Estella he made the acquaintance of the Señora Frasquita; fell in love with her, married her, and took her away with him to Andalusia in search of the mill where they were to be so peaceful and happy during the rest of their peregrination through this valley of tears and laughter.

Frasquita, transplanted from Navarra to comparative solitude, had not acquired any Andalusian habits, and differed much from the country women of the neighbourhood. She dressed with more simplicity, ease and elegance than they did; washed herself oftener and allowed the sun and air to caress her bare arms and throat; she wore to a certain extent the dress of the ladies of that epoch, the dress of Queen Maria Louise, with a very short skirt showing her small feet and part of her well turned leg; she wore her bodice cut round and low after the fashion at Madrid (where she and Lucas stayed two

months on their way from Navarra to Andalucia), and all her hair gathered at the top of the crown, which showed off the fine turn of her head and neck; she had earrings in her diminutive ears, and many rings on the taper fingers of her hard but clean hands. In conclusion her voice possessed all the notes of the most extensive and melodious instruments, and her laugh was so joyous and silvery that it seemed a chiming of *Sábado de Gloria*.

Let us now sketch Uncle Lucas.

V.

A MAN SEEN FROM WITHOUT AND FROM WITHIN.

UNCLE Lucas was more ugly than Punch. He had been so all his life, and he was now about forty years old. Nevertheless, God has presented few men so good natured and agreeable to this earth. Pleased with his vivacity, spirit and gentleness, the deceased Bishop begged him of his parents who were pastors, not of souls, but of real sheep. After the death of his Most Illustrious patron, and after leaving the seminary for the barracks he was picked out from all the other soldiers by General Caro, who made him his principal orderly and campaign servant. Having acquitted himself of his military duties, it was as easy for Uncle Lucas to subjugate the heart of Frasquita as it had been to acquire the goodwill and appreciation of the General and the Bishop. The Navarrese, who had then seen twenty summers, and was the right eye of all the young fellows of Estella, some of whom were pretty rich, could not resist the constant attentions, the witty tales, the oglings and the joyous smile, full of mischief and sweetness, of the gay Murcian. Indeed, he was so

bold, so loquacious, so clever, so graceful and so valiant that he turned the head, not only of the coveted beauty, but also of her father and mother.

Lucas was short of stature, (at least in comparison with his wife), a trifle round shouldered, very brown, with a thin beard, a large nose, long ears, and was, moreover, pitted with the small-pox. On the other hand, his mouth was regular and his teeth perfect. It might be said that only the bark of the man was rough and ugly; that as soon as one penetrated within, his perfections were apparent; and that these perfections commenced with his teeth; next came his voice, vibrating, elastic, and attractive, manly and grave at times, sweet and melodious whenever he begged for anything, and always difficult to resist. Then came what the voice said; everything opportune, discrete, ingenious, persuasive, And finally in the soul and mind of Lucas there were valour, loyalty, honour, common sense, a desire for information, a kind of instinctive and empirical knowledge of many things, a profound contempt for fools, whatever might be their social rank, and a certain spirit of irony, banter and sarcasm that might have made him pass for a Don Francisco de Quevedo in the rough.

Such was Uncle Lucas within and without.

VI.

THE TALENTS OF A MARRIED COUPLE.

FRASQUITA loved Lucas madly, and considered herself the happiest woman in the world in being adored by him. They had no children, as we already know, and had dedicated themselves to care for and fondle one another; but their

solicitude and tenderness did not partake the sentimental and cloying character which the wheedling and coaxing of so many childless couples exhibit. On the contrary they were ever joyful and merry, exhibiting the confidence of children who are playfellows, and who love each other with all their soul without ever saying so, or even rendering an account to themselves of what they feel.

It is impossible that there has ever been a miller better cared for, better dressed, better fed, or surrounded with more home comforts than Uncle Lucas! It is equally impossible that any miller's wife, or any Queen even, has been the object of so many attentions, of so much kindness and tenderness as Frasquita met with! It is also equally impossible that any mill has ever contained so many things necessary, useful, agreeable, recreative, and even superfluous, as the one serving as the theatre of most of the present story.

What contributed very much to this was that Frasquita, the beautiful, active, robust and healthy Navarrese, knew how, and was willing, and able to cook, sew, and embroider, sweep, make sweetmeats, wash, iron, whitewash, scour, knead, weave, knit stockings, sing, dance, play the guitar, play at cards, and do many other things, the relation of which would be interminable. And what contributed no less to the same result was that Uncle Lucas knew how and was willing and able to manage the mill, cultivate the garden, shoot, fish, do carpenter's, blacksmith's and mason's work, help his wife in all domestic affairs, read, write tell stories, etc.

In addition, he possessed some rather extraordinary qualities. For instance, Uncle Lucas loved flowers (as his wife did), and was such a perfect floriculturist that by means of laborious combinations he had succeeded in producing some new varieties. He was something of an engineer, and had shown his skill

by constructing a dam, a culvert, and an aqueduct which trebled the volume of water at the mill. He had taught a dog to dance, tamed a snake, and by the aid of a sundial on the wall had trained a parrot to announce the hour by cries, indicating the time with the greatest accuracy even on dark days and during the night.

In conclusion, there was at the back of the mill an orchard which produced every kind of fruit and vegetable; a pond enclosed by a sort of arbour of jessamine, where in summer both Uncle Lucas and Frasquita bathed; a garden; a hot-house for exotic plants; a fountain of drinkable water; a couple of donkeys on which the pair went to the city or the neighbouring villages; a fowl-house; a dovecot; an aviary; a fish-pond; a house for rearing silkworms; bee-hives, the bees of which sucked the jessamines; a wine press, with its neighbouring cellar, both on a miniature scale; an oven; a loom; a forge; a carpenter's workshop, etc., all attached to a house containing eight rooms, with about a couple of acres of land, and rated as being worth some ten thousand reals.

VII

THE FOUNDATION OF FELICITY.

YES, the miller and his wife loved one another distractedly, and it might even have been thought that she loved him better than he loved her, in spite of his being so ugly and her so beautiful. I say this, because Frasquita used to frown and to ask for an explanation when Uncle Lucas was late in returning from the city or the villages where he had gone for grain; whilst Uncle Lucas saw with pleasure the attentions paid to Frasquita by the gentlemen who frequented the mill.

He exulted and rejoiced when everybody found her as bewitching as he did himself, and although he understood that in the bottom of their hearts some of them envied him, and coveted her like mere mortals, and would have given something for her to have been less good, he left her alone whole days without the least anxiety, and never asked her what she had been doing, or who had been at the house during his absence.

It was not that the love of Uncle Lucas was less strong than that of Frasquita ; it was that he had more confidence in her virtue than she had in his. He had the advantage of her in penetration and knew to what point he was loved, and how much his wife respected herself. Besides, Uncle Lucas was a thorough man ; a man like one of Shakspeare's, of few and strong sentiments ; incapable of doubts, who believed or died ; who loved or slew ; who admitted no gradation or transition between supreme felicity and the extermination of his happiness. He was a Murcian Othello, in the first act of a possible tragedy.

But why these lugubrious notes in so gay an interlude ? Why these flashes of lightning in so serene an atmosphere ? Why these tragical attitudes in a bit of genre painting ?

You shall know the reason presently.

VIII.

THE MAN WITH THE THREE-CORNERED HAT.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon of a day in October. The bell of the Cathedral was ringing for vespers, which was equivalent to saying that all the principal persons of the city had dined. The Canons were directing their steps

toward the choir; the laity were seeking their couches to enjoy their siesta, particularly the higher officials who had passed the morning engaged in work.

It was therefore very strange that at this hour, so unsuited for taking a walk, as it was still very hot, there left the city, on foot, attended by a single constable, the illustrious Señor Corregidor of the said city, who could not be mistaken, either by day or night, for any other person, as much on account of the enormous dimensions of his three-corned hat, and the beauty of his cloak of fine, scarlet cloth, as his peculiar, grotesque mien.

Concerning the scarlet cloak and the three-corned hat, there are still many persons who can speak with a perfect knowledge. We, like all those born in the said city, in the latter years of the reign of Ferdinand VII., remember having seen hanging on a nail, the sole ornaments of a bare wall, in the ruinous tower of the house which his worship inhabited (a tower destined, in due course, to be the scene of the infantile gambols of his grandchildren) those two antiquated elegancies, the cloak and the hat—the black hat above and the red cloak below—forming, as it were, a spectre of Absolutism, a sort of winding sheet of the Corregidor, a kind of retrospective caricature of his power in charcoal and red ochre; in short, a species of scarecrow, which formerly had played the part of scareman, and which at the present day is, I am afraid, an object of ridicule when paraded during the Carnival by a chimney sweep, or serving as a laughable disguise to the idiot who makes the people laugh the most. Poor principle of authority!

With respect to the grotesque mien of the Señor Corregidor, to which we have alluded, this arose from his round shoulders—much rounder than Uncle Lucas's, almost approaching a hump, to speak plainly; a stature below the average; a very feeble

appearance ; bad health ; bandy legs, and a way of walking *sui generis* (balancing himself from one side to the other) which, however absurd it may seem, can only be described by saying that he appeared to be lame of both feet. On the other hand, his face was not amiss, although rather drawn in through the want of both front and back teeth ; an olive-brown complexion, like that of the sons of Castille generally ; with large black eyes, in which sparkled anger, despotism, and sensuality ; with delicate and lively features, devoid of the expression of personal valour, but indicative of active malice capable of everything ; also a certain air of satisfaction, half aristocratic, half licentious, which showed that in his remote youth he had been very agreeable and welcome to women, notwithstanding his legs and his hump.

Don Eugenio de Zuñiga y Ponce de Leon (for so his worship was called), was born in Madrid, of an illustrious family, and at the time we speak of, was bordering on his fifty-fifth year, having been four years Corregidor in the city, of which we speak, and where, shortly after his arrival, he married the great lady of whom we shall have something to say further on. -

The stockings of Don Eugenio (the only part of his dress in addition to his shoes which his capacious cloak permitted to be seen) were white, and his shoes black, with gold buckles. But as soon as the heat of the country compelled him to loosen his cloak, there became visible a large cambric neckcloth, a dove-coloured serge waistcoat, splendidly embroidered ; black silk knee breeches ; an enormous coat of the same stuff as the waistcoat ; a sword with a cut steel hilt ; a cane with tassels, and a respectable pair of chamois gloves or gauntlets, which the Corregidor never wore, but carried in his hands like a sceptre.

The constable, who followed his chief at a distance of

twenty paces, was named Garduña, which in English means a weasel, and no better name could have been given him. Lank, active, looking before and behind, to the right and the left, all at the same time as he stalked along with outstretched neck; a small and repugnant face; and hands, the fingers of which seemed like the lashes of a cat-o'nine-tails: he presented at once, the appearance of a ferret in search of criminals, the cord that was to bind them, and the implement destined for their chastisement.

The first Corregidor who cast eyes on him said, without making any enquiries, "Thou shalt be my alguacil," and he had already held that office under four Corregidores. He was forty-four years old, and wore a three-cornered hat, much smaller than that of his chief; his cloak, stockings, and other articles of dress were black; he carried a cane without tassels, and a kind of spit as a sword.

This black scarecrow appeared to be the shadow of his handsome master.

IX.

"GEE UP, DOBBIN."

WHEREVER this distinguished personage and his attendant passed by, the labourers left off work, and bowed down to the ground with more fear than respect; after which they said to one another in a low voice:

"It is very early in the afternoon for the Señor Corregidor to go and visit the Señá Frasquita."

"Early—and alone," added someone who was accustomed to see him always take that walk in company with other persons.

"I say, Manuel, why is the Señor Corregidor going alone

this afternoon to see the Navarrese?" asked a countrywoman of her husband, who had her seated behind him on the back of a donkey. And as she questioned him, she tickled him by way of a joke.

"Don't think so badly of people, Josefa," said the good man. "Seña Frasquita is incapable——"

"I don't say the contrary. But for all that, the Corregidor is not incapable of falling in love with her; I have heard it said that of all those who go to the mill, the only one who has any evil motive is the Corregidor, whose fondness for petticoats everyone knows."

"How do you know he is fond of petticoats?" asked her husband.

"I don't say it on my own account. He would have to be careful, although he is a Corregidor, how he praised my black eyes." She who spoke thus was ugly in a superlative degree.

"I do not think Uncle Lucas is a man to permit such a thing," said the countryman. "He is a nasty customer when he is angered."

"But, suppose he sees his advantage," rejoined his wife, poutingly.

"Uncle Lucas is an honest man," was the reply, "and such things never suit an honest man."

"You are quite right," said Josefa: "still, if I were the Seña Frasquita——"

"Gee up!" cried the husband to his donkey, to change the conversation.

And the animal broke into a trot, thus preventing the rest of the dialogue from being heard.

X.

UNDER THE VINE.

WHILST the peasants who saluted the Corregidor were thus discoursing, Frasquita was carefully mopping the paved space serving as a courtyard to the mill, and placing half a chairs under the thickest shade of the bower, above which Uncle Lucas was engaged cutting the best bunches of grapes and arranging them artistically in a basket.

"So, Frasquita," said Uncle Lucas from the summit of the bower, "if the Señor Corregidor is enamoured of you in a dishonourable way——"

"I've told you so a long time," replied the young woman from the North. "But what does it matter. Take care, Lucas, or you will fall!"

"Don't mind me; I'm fixed firmly enough. So you please him very much?"

"Don't say anything more about it," she exclaimed, "I know very well whom I please and whom I don't please. Would that I knew why I don't please you."

"Because you are so ugly," replied Uncle Lucas.

"Ugly as I am, I'm able to get on the vine and throw you down head first."

"It would be still more easy for me to keep you at the top of the vine."

"So! and when my gallants came, they would say we were two monkeys."

"And they would be right: you are quite a little monkey, and I also seem to be one, with this humpback of mine."

"Which I very much admire."

"If so, you no doubt like the Corregidor's better, for his is the larger one."

"Come! come! Señor Don Lucas—you appear to be getting jealous."

"Jealous of that hypocrite! On the contrary, I'm very glad that he admires you."

"Why?"

"Because the sin carries its own punishment."

"But only fancy if I did love him; there are more rare things in the world than that."

"I shouldn't mind."

"Why?"

"Because you would be no longer yourself, and being no longer your own self, I should not care if the devil ran away with you."

"Well, what would you do in such a case?"

"Why, as I should then be another, and not who I am, I cannot say what I should think."

"And why should you be another?"

"Because I am now a man who believes in you as in himself, and who only lives by that faith. Consequently, if I ceased to believe in you, I should die, or at least be transformed into a new being; I should live a changed life; I should appear to myself as if I had just been born; I should have another mind. I don't know therefore what I should do with you. It might be that I should burst out laughing and turn my back on you; it might be that I should no longer recognise you; it might be that—but let us not be putting ourselves into a bad humour without cause. What does it matter to us if all the Corregidores in the world love you? Are you not my Frasquita?"

"Yes, barbarian," replied the Navarrese, laughing as loud as she could, "I am your Frasquita, and you are the Lucas of my soul, uglier than a bogey, with more talent than other men, better than the most delicious food, and more beloved

—Ah! you shall see what it is to be beloved when you come down from the vine! Prepare yourself to receive more boxes on the ears than you have hairs in your head. But hush! what do I see! The Señor Corregidor coming this way, and quite alone, and so early; there is some trick in this.”

“Then be calm and do not say I am upon the vine. He comes to declare himself to you alone, thinking to rob me while I am taking my *siesta*. I should like to amuse myself hearing his declaration.”

Thus spoke Uncle Lucas, handing the basket to his wife.

“It isn’t a bad idea!” she exclaimed, bursting out again into laughter. “The demon! who would have thought that I might possess a Corregidor? But here he comes—Garduña, who was following him, has seated himself in the shade by the stream. What absurdity! Hide yourself well among the branches. We are going to have some fun; more than you fancy.”

The beautiful Navarrese then began to hum the “Fandango,” which was already as familiar to her as the songs of her native province.

XI.

THE BOMBARDMENT.

“God be with you! Frasquita,” said the Corregidor, in a low voice, as he presented himself beneath the arbour, walking on tiptoe.

“Well! Señor Corregidor,” she replied, making a thousand curtsies. “Your worship here at this time of day! and in such a hot sun! Your worship must sit down here where it is a little cooler. Why did you not wait for the other

gentlemen ? Here are their seats already arranged for them. This afternoon we expect the Lord Bishop, who promised my Lucas to come and try the early grapes. And how is your worship and your good lady ? ”

The Corregidor felt a little uneasy. The longed-for privacy in which he at last found Frasquita appeared to him a dream, or a trap laid for him by a hostile fate, only to make him fall into the abyss of deception. So he confined himself to replying :

“ It is not so early as you say ; it is half-past three.”

At this moment the parrot gave a shriek.

“ It is a quarter-past two,” said the Navarrese, looking at her visitor from head to foot.

The latter was silent, like a convicted prisoner who has abandoned all defence. After a short time, he ventured to ask :

“ And Lucas ? Is he asleep ? ”

We ought to remark here that the Corregidor, like all who have no teeth, spoke in a feeble and sibilant manner, as if he were eating his own lips.

“ Certainly,” replied Frasquita. “ At this time of day he is capable of falling asleep anywhere, even on the edge of a precipice.”

“ Then let him sleep,” exclaimed the old Corregidor, who turned paler than ever. “ And you, my dear Frasquita, listen to me—hear what I have to say to you ; but come nearer first—sit down here, by my side—I have many things to tell you.”

“ I am seated already,” was the reply, and the miller’s wife took up a low seat and placed it in front of the Corregidor, at a short distance from him.

As soon as she was seated, she crossed one leg over the other, leant her body a trifle forward, supported an elbow on

her knee, and rested her fresh and beautiful cheek on one of her hands, and thus, with her head a little on one side, a smile on her lips, her five dimples in activity, and her calm eyes fixed on the Corregidor, she awaited his worship's declaration. She might have been compared to Pampeluna waiting bombardment.

The poor man was about to speak, but he remained with his mouth open, amazed at this grand beauty, those resplendent graces, that imposing form, that woman of alabaster complexion, laughing mouth, and blue, unscrutable eyes, who appeared to have been created by the pencil of Rubens.

"Frasquita," murmured at last the delegate of the King, in faint accents, whilst his pale face, covered with perspiration, expressed immense anguish, "Frasquita!"

"What is it?" asked the daughter of the Pyrenees.

"What you like," replied the old fellow, with unspeakable tenderness.

"What I like, you know already," said the miller's wife; "what I wish for is that you appoint a nephew of mine who lives in Estella, secretary of the Town Council, so that he may be able to leave the mountains where he is enduring every kind of hardship."

"I have told you, Frasquita, that it is impossible. The present secretary——"

"Is a thief, a drunkard, and a beast."

"I know it—but he has many friends, and I cannot do anything without the consent of the Corporation. Otherwise I run the risk——"

"Run the risk! What risks would not all in this house down to the cats run for the sake of your worship?"

"Will you love me at this price?" stammered the Corregidor.

"No, Señor, as I like you gratis ——"

"Woman, do not jest. Speak to me of yourself, or of what *you* desire. When will you love me? Say!"

"Have I not said that I like you now?"

"But——"

"There is no but that is worth anything; you will see how handsome and what a good man my nephew is."

"You, indeed, are handsome, Frasquita!"

"Do I please you?"

"Do you please me? There is no woman like you."

"Then, look here. Here there is nothing artificial," replied Frasquita, rolling up the sleeve of her jacket, and showing the Corregidor her arm, worthy of a caryatid and whiter than a lily.

"Do you please me?" continued the Corregidor. "By day and night—at all times—everywhere, I think only of you."

"But why? Do you not love the lady Corregidor?" said Frasquita, with a feigned compassion which would have made a hypochondriac laugh. "What a pity! My Lucas told me he had the pleasure of seeing and speaking to her when he mended your clock, and he says she is very pretty, very good, and of very amiable manners."

"Not so very; not so very," murmured the Corregidor, with a certain bitterness.

"On the other hand, others have told me that she is very malicious, very jealous, and that you are downright afraid of her."

"Not so much of it, woman," repeated Don Eugenio de Zuñiga y Ponce de Leon, changing colour. "Not so much and not so little. The Señora has her peculiarities, it is certain, but I am not afraid of her. That is quite another thing. Recollect that I am the Corregidor."

"But, in short, do you love her or do you not love her?"

"I will tell you. I love her very much, or rather, I did

love her before I knew you, but since I saw you I am no longer myself. I do not know what change has come over me, and she knows herself that some change has taken place. I can love her no longer. To touch my wife's cheek, for instance, is the same as touching my own, while to touch your hand, your arm, your waist, I would give all I possess."

And speaking thus, the Corregidor tried to seize the bare arm of Frasquita, but she unconcernedly, with the greatest calmness, put out her hand, touched the chest of his worship with the pacific violence and invincible rigidity of an elephant's trunk, and knocked him backwards, chair and all.

"Ave Maria!" exclaimed the Navarrese, laughing outright. "Surely the chair must have been broken."

"What's up?" cried out Uncle Lucas, showing his ugly face through an opening in the vine.

The Corregidor was still on the ground, flat on his back, and gazed with an indescribable terror at the man thus appearing in the air face downwards.

"What's up?" Frasquita hastened to reply. "Only this, the Señor Corregidor placed his chair unevenly, and, moving it about, he fell."

"Jesus, Maria, and Joseph!" exclaimed the miller in turn. "And has his worship hurt himself? Would he like a little vinegar and water?"

"I'm not hurt," said the Corregidor, rising as best he could; and then he added, in a low voice, but so that Frasquita could hear him, "You shall pay for this."

"But, on the other hand, his worship has saved my life," replied Uncle Lucas from the top of the vine. "Fancy, wife, I was seated here looking at the grapes and dropped off asleep amongst the branches, and if the fall of his worship had not awoken me in time, I should have broken my neck on those stones."

"So! eh?" said the Corregidor. "Then, man, I am very glad I have fallen. You shall pay me for this," he repeated in an undertone to the miller's wife. And he uttered these words with such an expression of concentrated fury that Frasquita became much concerned. She saw clearly that the Corregidor was frightened at first, believing that the miller had heard all; but that, persuaded now that he had heard nothing—for the calmness and dissimulation of Uncle Lucas would have deceived the most sagacious—he was beginning to give himself up to feelings of anger and to form plans of vengeance.

"Come down from there and help me to clean his worship, who is all over dust," exclaimed Frasquita.

And whilst Lucas was coming down, she whispered in the Corregidor's ear: "The poor fellow has heard nothing; he was sleeping like a dormouse."

These words and, above all, the circumstance of their being said in a low voice, affecting complicity and secrecy, produced a marvellous effect.

"Naughty rogue!" stammered Don Eugenio, his mouth watering, but still growling.

"You won't owe me any grudge?" urged the Navarrese in a wheedling tone.

The Corregidor, seeing that severity produced good results, tried to look at Frasquita with a furious expression, but meeting her fascinating smile and divine eyes, in which shone the caress of a prayer, he opened his mouth, and disclosing more than ever the total absence of teeth, he said, "It depends on you, my love."

At that moment, Uncle Lucas leapt down from the vine.

XII.

TITHES AND FIRST FRUITS.

As soon as the Corregidor was again seated, Frasquita threw a rapid glance towards the miller, and saw him not only smiling as ever, but ready to split with laughter at the occurrence. Taking care not to be seen by Don Eugenio, she kissed her hand to her husband, and then said to the Don, in the voice of a siren, such as Cleopatra would have envied :

“ Now your worship must try our grapes.”

You should then have seen the beautiful Navarrese, worthy of a Titian's pencil, standing opposite to the amazed Corregidor, fresh, magnificent, with her noble limbs, her close-fitting dress, her tall stature, her bare arms raised above her head, and with a bunch of grapes in each hand, saying to him, between an irresistible smile and a supplicating and almost frightened look :

“ The Lord Bishop has not yet tried them ; they are the first gathered this year.”

She appeared a gigantic Pomona, offering fruit to a rural god—a satyr, for instance.

At this moment there appeared at the end of the courtyard the venerable Bishop of the diocese, accompanied by the Advocate-Academician, and two Canons of advanced age, and followed by his secretary, two attendants and two pages. His lordship stopped a little while to contemplate the comic yet beautiful picture, until at last he said, with the calm accent peculiar to prelates of that time : “ Christian doctrine teaches us to pay tithes and first fruits to the Church ; but you, Señor Corregidor, are not content with the administration of the tithes, but also seek to eat the first fruits.”

"The Lord Bishop!" exclaimed the miller and his wife, leaving the Corregidor and running to kiss the prelate's pastoral ring.

"May God repay your lordship for honouring this poor cottage with a visit," said Uncle Lucas, with the appearance of sincere veneration.

"God bless him and preserve him many years," chimed in Frasquita.

"You bless me instead of asking me to bless you," said the good pastor, laughing; and extending his fingers he blessed Frasquita and then the others standing around.

"Here, your lordship has the first fruits, said the Corregidor, taking a bunch of grapes from Frasquita's hands and presenting it courteously to the Bishop, "I've not yet tried them." The Corregidor pronounced these words, directing a rapid and cynical look at the splendid beauty of Frasquita.

"It isn't because they are green like those in the fable," observed the Academician.

"Those of the fable," said the Bishop, "were not green, Señor Licentiate; but out of the reach of the fox."

Neither had intended the slightest allusion to the Corregidor; but both phrases were so appropriate to what had just happened, that Don Eugenio de Zuñiga became livid with rage, and said, kissing the prelate's ring: "That is equivalent to calling me a fox, my lord."

"What sayst thou?" rejoined the latter, with the affable severity of a saint, which in point of fact he was said to be. "Such an excuse is in itself an accusation. As the man so his speech. But enough has been said; to say more would be to preach a sermon. So let us see these famous grapes," and he took a single one from the Corregidor's bunch. "They are very good," he exclaimed, looking at the grape as he held

it up to the light, and then handing it to his secretary said, "It is a pity they do not agree with me."

The secretary in turn eyed the grape with a courtier-like gesture of admiration, and handed it to one of the attendants. The servant copied the action of the Bishop and the gesture of the secretary, and in addition smelt the grape; then placed it in the basket with scrupulous care, observing in a low tone to those around: "His lordship is fasting."

Uncle Lucas, who had not once lost sight of the grape, took it surreptitiously and ate it without anyone seeing him do so.

Then they all sat down and spoke of the autumn season, which promised to be very dry; discussed the probability of a fresh war between Napoleon and Austria; and persisted in the belief that the Imperial troops would never enter Spanish territory. The Advocate complained of the revolutions and calamities of that age, envying the tranquil times of his fathers (as his fathers envied those of his grandfathers). The parrot screeched out "Five o'clock!" and at a sign from the Bishop, the youngest of the pages went to the carriage of his lordship which had drawn up in the same shady spot as the Corregidor's attendant had selected, and returned with a magnificent tart of huge dimensions, which had come out of the oven only an hour before; and a table having been placed in the midst of the company, the operation of cutting up the tart commenced. A portion was given to Lucas and Frasquita, notwithstanding their reluctance to accept it; and an equality truly democratic reigned during an hour under those vines, through which streamed the last rays of a setting sun.

XIII.

WHAT THE JACKDAW SAID TO THE RAVEN.

AN hour and a half later, all the illustrious guests of Uncle Lucas had returned to the city. The Lord Bishop and his suite had arrived the first, thanks to their coach, and alighted at the palace, where we will leave them, about to perform their devotions.

The eminent Advocate, who was very lean, and the two Canons, who were very fat and very venerable, accompanied the Corregidor as far as the door of the town hall, where his worship said he had business to transact, and then they took the road to their respective houses, guiding themselves, like navigators, by the stars, and feeling their way like blind men ; for night had already set in, though the moon was not yet visible, and such a thing as street lighting, like the other lights of the century, was still in the womb of time.

"What hairbrained fellows we are !" said the Advocate to the two Canons. "What will they think at home, seeing us arrive at this late hour ?"

"And what will those say who meet us in the street in this way at half-past six, like footpads hiding themselves in the darkness ?"

"We might improve our conduct."

"Ah, yes ; but that delightful mill !"

"It is nausea to my wife," said the Academician, in a tone of voice which revealed some apprehension of a conjugal reprimand.

"And to my nieces !" exclaimed one of the Canons, who was a Penitentiary ; "they always say that priests ought not to visit gossips."

"Nevertheless," interrupted his companion, who was a Prebendary, "what passes there could not be more innocent."

"And even the Lord Bishop goes."

"And then, gentlemen, at our age!" said the Penitentiary. "I have already completed my sixty-fifth year."

"That's true," said the Prebendary; "but let us speak of something else. How charming Frasquita this afternoon!"

"Oh, yes; she is pretty enough!" said the Advocate, affecting impartiality.

"Very pretty," repeated the Penitentiary.

"If she isn't, ask the Corregidor—the poor man is in love with her," added the Prebendary.

"I believe you!" exclaimed the Penitentiary.

"Certainly," acquiesced the correspondent of the Academy. "But, gentlemen, I must turn off here to reach home. Good night."

"Good night," replied the churchmen.

The two Canons proceeded some distance in silence. Then the Prebendary poked the Penitentiary in the ribs, and said, "She pleases him, too, I think, as well as the Corregidor."

"As if she saw that," replied the other, who now stopped at the door of his house. "And what a brute he is! So good night till to-morrow. May the grapes agree with you."

"Till to-morrow, if God wills it. May you have a good night."

"God give us a good night!" prayed the Penitentiary, now within his own portal, ornamented with a lamp and an image of the Virgin, and he knocked at the door.

The Canon who was left by himself advanced slowly towards his home. He was broader than he was tall, and

appeared to roll in his walk. As he reached his door he was saying to himself, as if he were thinking of his late companion :

"And Frasquita pleases you as well as the others ; and the truth is," he added, after a moment's pause, "she is beauty itself."

XIV.

GARDUÑA'S ADVICE.

IN the meanwhile, the Corregidor had entered the town hall, accompanied by Garduña, with whom for some time he carried on a more familiar conversation than befitted a man of his quality and position.

"Believe a pointer who knows what game is," said the unworthy constable. "Frasquita is enamoured of your worship to desperation, and what your worship has just told me makes the affair more clear than that light." And he pointed to a lantern that scarcely lit up even a corner of the room.

"I am not so sure as you," replied Don Eugenio, sighing.

"Then I don't know why. And if not, let us speak freely. Your worship, pardon me for saying it, has a blemish in your figure. Is it not true ?

"Well, yes," replied the Corregidor. "But Uncle Lucas has the same ; and his hump is larger than mine."

"Much larger ! very much larger ! There is no comparison. But, on the other hand, and this is what I was going to say, your worship has a face pleasant to look at—what is called a handsome face—whilst Uncle Lucas is unquestionably ugly."

The Corregidor smiled with a certain pride.

"For the rest," continued the officer, "Frasquita is capable of anything, provided that her nephew be nominated to——"

"There we are agreed. That nomination is my only hope."

"Then let us put our hands to the work, Señor. I have already laid my plan before your lordship. We have now only to put it into execution, and that we must do this very evening."

"I've told you many times that I don't need your counsel!" cried Don Eugenio, suddenly remembering that he was talking with an inferior.

"I thought your worship asked me for it," stammered Garduña.

"Do not reply to me." Garduña bowed.

The Corregidor continued: "You were saying that the matter could be arranged this very night. That sounds well, and in such case I should be at once delivered from this cruel uncertainty." Garduña kept silent.

The Corregidor went to a desk, wrote something on a stamped paper, sealed it, and placed it in his pocket.

"Now the nomination is made," he said, taking a pinch of snuff. "To-morrow I will arrange it with the Corporation. Don't you think I'm doing well?"

"Quite right," exclaimed Garduña enthusiastically, laying his claws on the Corregidor's snuff-box, and trying to take a pinch surreptitiously. "Quite right. Your worship's predecessor never stopped till he finished the thing he had attempted. On re——"

"Cease your chattering," said the Corregidor, slapping him on the hand which touched the snuff-box. "My predecessor was a fool when he took you for constable. But let us come to what is important. You were saying to me that Uncle Lucas's mill was not within this parish. Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. The city jurisdiction ends where I was

seated when waiting for your worship. If I were in your place——”

“Enough!” cried Don Eugenio. “You are impertinent.”

The Corregidor then wrote something on a piece of paper, folded it, and gave it to Garduña.

“There,” he said, “is the letter you asked for to present to the mayor of the district in which the mill lies. You will explain to him by word of mouth what he has to do. You see I am following your plan literally, and it will be all over with you if you put me in a hole I can’t get out of.”

“No fear of that,” replied Garduña. “Señor Juan Lopez has much to fear, and your signature will make him do whatever I order him. He owes at least fifteen hundred bushels of corn to the State, and as much to the Church, and is a gambler, a drunkard and a rake-hell. And this man wields authority. So runs the world——”

“I have told you to be quiet. You are driving me distracted,” cried the Corregidor. “But let us come to business,” he added in a milder tone. “It is now a quarter past six. The first thing you have to do is to go to my house and inform my wife that she need not expect me at supper, or any time to night. Tell her that I shall be working here till twelve o’clock, and that then I shall go with you to see if we can’t catch some culprits. In short, deceive her well, so that she may go to rest without any anxiety. On the way, tell another constable to bring me my supper. I dare not appear to night before my wife, for she knows me so well that she might read my thoughts. Tell the cook to give the other constable some of to-day’s fritters, and tell him to get me half a bottle of white wine from the tavern and to take care that no one sees what he is doing. Then go to the village, where you must be by half-past eight.”

“At eight exactly I shall be there,” exclaimed Garduña.

"Don't contradict me!" roared the Corregidor.

Again remembering who he was, the officer bowed.

"From there to the mill is about half a league," continued the Corregidor; "and we have arranged that at eight exactly you will be there."

"It is a short half a league," said Garduña.

"Don't interrupt me," again roared Don Eugenio.

The officer again bowed.

"A short half league," pursued the Corregidor. "Consequently at ten o'clock—do you think by ten o'clock?"

"Before ten; at half past-nine you will be able to knock without anxiety at the door of the mill."

"Fellow! don't tell me what I shall be able to do. I suppose you will be there?"

"I shall be everywhere. But my head quarters will be the river side. Ah! I forgot. Go on foot, your worship, and carry no lantern."

"I don't want your advice; do you think it is the first time I've set out on such a campaign?"

"I beg your worship's pardon. Ah! something else. Do not knock at the large door that opens on to the paved space with the vine, but at the small door by the sluice."

"What! is there another door by the sluice? That had not occurred to me."

"It is so, your worship. It leads to the bedroom, and Uncle Lucas never enters or leaves by it, so that in case he should return suddenly——"

"I understand; don't deafen my ears any longer."

"Try and slip out before the morning. The sun rises at six o'clock now."

"That's more useless advice. At five o'clock I shall be at home. But we've spoken enough already. Get out of my sight"

"Then I wish you good luck, Señor," exclaimed the constable, putting out his hand towards the Corregidor and looking up at the ceiling at the same time.

The Corregidor gave a peseta to Garduña, who immediately disappeared as if by enchantment.

"By the saints," murmured the old man a moment later, "I forgot to tell him to send me a pack of cards; with one I might have played patience till half-past nine."

XV.

A PROSAIC PARTING.

AT about nine o'clock on the same evening Uncle Lucas and Frasquita, having finished the work of the mill and the house, were supping off a salad of endive, some meat stewed with tomatoes, and some grapes left from those in the already mentioned basket, the whole being washed down with a little wine, and made the more digestible by bursts of laughter at the expense of the Corregidor; after which the affectionate pair looked at one another, as if they were satisfied with Providence, and with themselves, and between a couple of yawns that revealed all the peace and tranquility of their hearts, said:

"Let us go to bed, and to-morrow will be another day."

At that very moment they heard two heavy knocks at the outer gate of the mill. Husband and wife looked at one another surprised. It was the first time they had heard a knock at their door at such an hour.

"I'm going to see," said the intrepid Navarrese, moving towards the door.

"Stop! that's for me to do," exclaimed Uncle Lucas, with

such dignity that Frasquita gave way at once. "I told you you were not to go out," he added with some asperity, on seeing that his wife wished to follow him. She obeyed and remained within the room.

"Who is it?" asked Uncle Lucas from the middle of the courtyard.

"The police!" replied a voice on the other side of the gate.

"What police?"

"The district police. Open the door to the Mayor."

Uncle Lucas looked through a carefully masked peep-hole in the door and recognised by the light of the moon the constable of the village.

"You mean that I am to open the door to his drunkard of a constable," replied the miller, withdrawing the bolt.

"It is the same thing," replied the voice from without, "since I have a warrant signed by his worship. I wish you a very good evening, Uncle Lucas," he added in less official tones.

"Good evening, Toñuelo," replied the Murcian. "Let us see what warrant you have. Señor Lopez might just as well have chosen a more seasonable hour to send to honest men. But I suppose it's your fault, not his; you've been trying to get drunk on the way. But will you have a glass now?"

"No, Señor, there is no time for anything, you have to follow me immediately. Read the warrant."

"What! follow you?" exclaimed Uncle Lucas, re-entering the house after taking the document. "Here, Frasquita! a light!"

Frasquita laid aside something she had caught hold of and took up a lamp.

Uncle Lucas glanced quickly towards the object which his wife had relinquished, and recognised an enormous blunderbuss, which carried bells half a pound in weight. The

millar looked at the Navarrese with an expression full of gratitude and tenderness, and said, pinching her cheek :

“What a treasure you are !”

Frasquita, pale and serene as a marble statue, raised the lamp, and without the slightest trepidation replied, dryly :

“Nonsense ; read !”

The order was as follows :—

“For the better service of His Majesty the King, our Lord, whom God preserve, I summon Lucas Fernandez, millar of these parts, to appear before me without fail immediately, all excuses and pretexts set aside, upon receiving this order ; and I warn him not to make anyone acquainted with the purport of the same, under penalties prescribed by law in case of disobedience.

“The Mayor, JUAN LOPEZ.”

A cross was affixed by way of signature.

“And what is this ?” asked Uncle Lucas of the officer.
“What’s the meaning of this order ?”

“I don’t know,” replied the constable, a man about thirty years old, whose angular and malicious looking face, like that of a robber and assassin, did not give the best idea of his sincerity. He continued : “I think it is about a question of witchcraft or false money. But you are not involved. They summon you as a witness or expert. In fact, I don’t know much about it myself. Señor Juan Lopez will explain it to you, with all particulars.”

“Good,” said the miller. “Tell him I will come to-morrow morning.”

“No, Señor. You must come with me this very hour, without losing a minute. That is the order given me by the Mayor.”

There was a moment of silence. The eyes of Frasquita

filled with tears. Uncle Lucas kept his fixed on the ground, as if seeking something. "At any rate," said he at last, "you will give me time to go to the stable and saddle a donkey."

"There is no necessity for that," said the constable. "Anyone can walk half a league. The night is very fine and the moon is shining."

"I've noticed that it has risen. But my feet are much swollen."

"Then don't let's lose any time. I'll help you to get the beast ready."

"You are not afraid I shall run away, are you?"

"I'm not afraid of anything, Uncle Lucas," replied Toñuelo, coolly. "I represent the law." While speaking he allowed a short gun under his cloak to be seen by Lucas.

"Look here, Toñuelo," said the miller's wife, "since you are going to the stable, do me the favour to get ready the other donkey."

"What for?" asked the miller.

"For me; I'm going with you."

"It can't be, Señá Frasquita," objected the constable. "I have orders to take your husband only, and prevent you following. If I don't do so, I shall risk my neck, so Señor Juan Lopez told me. Come, then, Uncle Lucas, let's go." And he directed his steps towards the door.

"A very strange thing," muttered the miller, without moving.

"Very strange," replied Frasquita.

"There is something in this, I can see," continued Lucas, lowering his voice so as not to be heard by Toñuelo.

"Would you like me to go to the city," whispered Frasquita, "and acquaint the Corregidor with what is happening."

"No!" replied Uncle Lucas in a decided voice; "certainly not!"

"Then what do you wish me to do?" asked she impatiently.

"Look at me," replied the old soldier.

The good couple regarded one another in silence, and both were so satisfied with the tranquility, resolution, and energy exhibited by each, that they ended by shrugging their shoulders and laughing. After that Uncle Lucas lit another lamp and went to the stable, first artfully remarking to Toñuelo: "Come along and help me man, if you will be so kind."

Toñuelo followed, humming a tune between his teeth. A few minutes afterwards Uncle Lucas quitted the mill, seated on a fine animal, and followed by the constable. The farewell of husband and wife was no more than the following:

"Shut the house up securely," said Uncle Lucas.

"Button your coat, it's cold," said Frasquita; and she then locked and bolted the door.

This is all that passed; there was no kiss, no embrace, no tender look. Why?

XVI.

A BIRD OF ILL OMEN.

LET us follow Uncle Lucas.

After journeying along for a quarter of a league without saying a word, the miller mounted on his donkey, which was urged forward by the constable with his staff of office, they saw on the summit of a rise in the road the form of something resembling an enormous bird coming towards them.

The figure, although at a considerable distance, was clearly visible against the moonlit sky, and its outline was defined with such clearness that the miller immediately exclaimed :

"Toñuelo, there is Garduña, with his three-cornered hat and knitting-needles of legs.

But before any reply could be made, the figure, evidently desirous of avoiding a meeting, quitted the road and ran across the fields with the celerity of a real bird.

"I don't see anything," replied Toñuelo with the greatest calmness.

"Nor I either," replied Uncle Lucas, smelling a rat. And the suspicion that had occurred to him in the mill began to acquire form and consistency in the humpback's jealous mind. "This journey of mine," he said to himself, "is an amorous stratagem on the part of the Corregidor. What I heard him say this afternoon when I was on the top of the vine demonstrates to me that the old fellow cannot wait any longer. Doubtless to-night he is going to repeat his visit at the mill, and he has begun by getting me out of the way. But what of that! Frasquita is Frasquita! She won't open the door even though they set fire to the house. I say more: even if she should open it, even if the Corregidor by some audacious manœuvre contrives to surprise my Navarrese, the poor man will soon beat a retreat the worse for the encounter. Frasquita is Frasquita! Nevertheless," he added at the expiration of a few moments, "there will be no harm in my getting back home as soon as possible."

They had now arrived at their destination, and proceeded at once to the Mayor's house.

XVII.

A RUSTIC MAYOR.

SEÑOR JUAN LOPEZ, both as a private individual and as Mayor, whenever he had to do with his inferiors was tyranny, ferocity and insolence personified ; yet he condescended, after despatching his official business and the work of his farm, and after giving his wife her daily beating, to drink a quart or two of wine in company with his secretary and the sacristan, a proceeding which he was more than half way through when the miller appeared in his august presence.

"Holloa, Uncle Lucas !" he said, scratching his head to excite the vein of falsehood. "How are you ? Secretary, pour out a glass of wine for Uncle Lucas. And Frasquita ? Is she as pretty as ever ? It's a very long time since I saw her. How well the grist turns out now. Rye bread looks as if made of white wheat. But, old fellow, sit down and rest yourself. Thank God we are in no hurry."

"Oh, hurry be damned !" was the somewhat testy reply of Uncle Lucas, who had up to that time preserved complete silence, but whose suspicions became all the stronger at seeing the friendly reception that was given him after such a pressing and terrible summons.

"Well, then, Uncle Lucas," continued the Mayor, "as you are in no hurry you shall sleep here to-night, and to-morrow morning we will despatch our little business."

"Very good," replied Uncle Lucas, with a dissimulation that a diplomatist might envy. "If the thing is not urgent I will wait."

"It isn't in the least urgent," added the Mayor, deceived by him whom he thought he was deceiving ; "and there is

not the slightest danger to you. You can rest perfectly tranquil. You, there, Toñuelo, move that measure, so that Uncle Lucas can sit down." The liquor was handed to the miller, who drank half of it.

"Manuela," cried the Mayor, "tell your mistress that Uncle Lucas will sleep here. Let her put a mattress in the granary."

"By no means. I sleep on straw, like a king."

"But we have mattresses."

"Yes; but I don't want to put your family to any inconvenience. I have my cloak."

"Just as you like. Manuela, tell your mistress the mattress will not be wanted."

"What I would ask," said Uncle Lucas, yawning fearfully, "is that I may go to rest immediately. I was at work all last night, and have not yet closed my eyes."

"By all means," replied the Mayor. "You may retire whenever you please."

"I think it is also time for us to be off," said the sacristan, looking at the pitcher of wine to see how much was left. "It must be already ten, or pretty near it."

"A quarter to ten," said the secretary, pouring what remained of the wine into the glasses.

"Then to bed, gentlemen," said the amphitryon, who at once swallowed his portion.

"Till to-morrow morning," added the miller, drinking his.

"Wait till they give you a light. Toñuelo, conduct Uncle Lucas to the hay-loft."

"This way," said Toñuelo, who took care to carry off the pitcher, in case a few drops might still remain at the bottom of it.

"Till to-morrow," added the sacristan, after draining all

the glasses in turn. And he staggered off singing "*De Profundis*."

"Well, Señor," said the Mayor to the secretary when they were alone, "Uncle Lucas suspects nothing. We can go to bed without the least anxiety ; and may the Corregido have good luck !"

XVIII.

UNCLE LUCAS SLEEPS LIGHTLY.

FIVE minutes after the party had broken up a man lowered himself down from the window of the hay-loft belonging to the Mayor—a window which looked on to a court-yard, and was only about nine feet from the ground.

In the yard there was a small shed, sheltering a range of mangers, to which were fastened six or eight beasts of burden of different breeds, but all of the gentler sex. The horses, mules, and asses of the masculine gender messed apart in a neighbouring building. The man untied a donkey which, as it happened, was already harnessed, and led it by the halter towards the yard door. Then he withdrew the bar and pulled back the bolt that secured the door, and on passing out found himself in the open country. Once there, he mounted the animal, dug his heels into its sides, and went off like an arrow in the direction of the city, but not by the ordinary road, for he followed lanes and bye-paths, as one who dreads an unprofitable meeting.

The man we speak of was Uncle Lucas, and he was making his way to the mill.

XIX.

VOICES CRYING IN THE DESERT.

"MAYORS meddling with me!" muttered the Murcian, on his way. "To-morrow morning I will go and see the Lord Bishop, and will relate to him all that has happened to me to-night. To summon me with so much haste and secrecy at such an unearthly hour; to tell me I must go alone; to speak to me of the service of the King; of false money, of witches, of fairies, and then to hand me a couple of glasses of wine and to send me to bed! The thing couldn't be clearer. Garduña must have given the mayor instructions to do this on the part of the Corregidor, who is doubtless at this very moment opening his campaign against my wife. Who knows but I shall find him knocking at the door of the mill? Perhaps I shall find him inside! Who knows? But what am I saying? To doubt my Navarrese! Oh, that is to blaspheme. God! Impossible that she—impossible that my Frasquita—impossible——But what am I saying? Is there anything impossible in the world? Did she not marry me, she being so beautiful and I so ugly?"

On making this last reflection the poor humpback began to weep. He stopped his donkey to calm himself and wipe away the tears; then he sighed deeply, and after a minute or two pulled out the necessary materials for smoking, made a cigarette, and, by aid of flint, steel and tinder was soon able to obtain a light. At this very moment he heard the sound of steps in the direction of the road, at a distance of about three hundred yards.

"What a fool I am!" he said. "Perhaps they are after me, and I have betrayed myself by striking that confounded light!"

He thereupon instantly extinguished the flame and dismounted and hid himself behind the donkey. But the beast looked at the matter in a different light, and brayed his satisfaction.

“Hang you !” exclaimed Uncle Lucas, trying to gag the animal’s mouth with his hands. But in due time there was heard another braying, by way of a gallant reply.

The miller remounted immediately, and rode off neck and crop in a contrary direction to the spot whence the second braying proceeded, whilst the individual on the other donkey, who was just as much frightened as Uncle Lucas, departed with equal speed, abandoning the road and taking to the fields on the opposite side. The Murcian noted this fact, which restored him his tranquillity, and he continued his way, muttering to himself :

“What a night ! What a world ! What a life mine has been during the last hour ! Alguacils made pimps of ; mayors conspiring against my honour ; asses braying when there is no necessity, and here, in my breast, a miserable heart that has dared to doubt the most noble woman God ever created ! Oh ! my God, my God ! Let me arrive quickly and find my Frasquita at home !”

Uncle Lucas continued his way, crossing paths and streams, until at last, about half-past eleven, he arrived at the outer gate of the mill.

“Damnation !” The mill door was open.

XX.

DOUBT AND REALITY.

THE door was open, and yet when the miller had started he had heard his wife lock and bolt it. Consequently no one but she could have opened it. But how? When? For whom? Through a trick? In consequence of a command? Or had she acted deliberately and voluntarily by virtue of a previous arrangement with the Corregidor? What was he about to see? What to know? What was awaiting him within doors? Had Frasquita taken to flight? Had she been carried off? Was she dead? Or was she in the arms of his rival?

"The Corregidor counted on my not being able to return all night," he said to himself, mournfully. "The Mayor had doubtless orders to put me in chains rather than I should return. Did Frasquita know all this? Was she in the plot? Or has she been the victim of a stratagem, of violence, of infamy?"

No more time was occupied in making these cruel reflections than was necessary to cross the paved court covered in by the vine in front of the house.

The house door, which as in most country dwellings led directly into the kitchen, was also open. Within the kitchen Lucas found no one. Nevertheless an enormous faggot was burning on the hearth where no fire was ever lit till the month of December. From one of the hooks of the dresser hung a lighted lamp. What signified all this? And how could these apparent preparations be reconciled with the deathlike silence which reigned in the house? What had become of his wife?

Then, and not till then, Lucas observed some clothes that

were hung on the backs of two or three chairs placed before the fire. He fixed his eyes on them, then burst out into a roar, which ended in a suffocating groan. The miserable man thought he was choking, and raised his hands to his neck; whilst livid, convulsed, with his eyes almost out of their sockets, he gazed at those garments, with much the same horror as a criminal feels when he approaches the gallows.

What he saw was the scarlet cloak, the three-cornered hat, the dove coloured coat and waistcoat, the black silk breeches, the white stockings, the shoes with buckles, and even the stick, sword, and gloves of the hateful Corregidor. He saw in these the shroud of his honour, the winding sheet of his happiness. The terrible blunderbuss stood in the same corner where the Navarrese had placed it two hours before. Uncle Lucas gave a tiger-like bound and seized it, and tried the barrel with the ramrod, and found it charged. Then he turned towards the staircase that led to the room where he had slept so many years with Frasquita, murmuring in a low voice:

“They are there!”

He advanced a step, but immediately stopped to look around to see if anyone was watching him.

“Nobody,” he said, mentally, “only God. And He has willed this.”

He was about to take another step, when his wandering eyes caught sight of a paper that lay on the table. To see it, to snatch it up, to hold it in his hands, was the work of a second. The paper was the nomination of Frasquita's nephew, signed by Don Eugenio de Zuñiga y Ponce de Leon.

“This has been the price of the sale!” thought Uncle Lucas, thrusting the paper into his mouth in order to suffocate his cries and to furnish food for his rage. “I always

suspected that she liked her family better than me. Ah ! We have had no children. That is the cause of all !”

And the poor wretch was on the point of weeping, but suddenly he grew furious again, and, with a most terrible look, muttered :

“Upstairs ! Upstairs !”

He began to mount the staircase, feeling the steps with one hand and carrying the blunderbuss in the other, holding, at the same time, the infamous document between his teeth.

On arriving at the door of the bedroom, which was closed, he observed, in corroboration of his natural suspicions, that some rays of light came through the crevices of the door and through the keyhole.

“They are there !” he said again. And he stopped, as if to gulp down this new draught of bitterness. Then he continued the ascent until he arrived at the very door. Within there was not the least sound. “I suppose no one is there,” hope whispered timidly. But at that instant the unhappy man heard somebody cough inside the room. It was the half-asthmatical cough of the Corregidor. There was no possible doubt ; no life-buoy to cling to in the shipwreck. The miller smiled horribly in the darkness.

How is it that such flashes do not illumine the obscurity ? What are all the flames of hell compared to those which burn at times in the heart of man ? Eventually Lucas began to grow calm, thinking he might not have heard the cough of the Corregidor after all. The reality caused him less pain than doubt. As he had said that very afternoon to Frasquita, from the hour he lost that faith in her which was the life of his soul he should begin to change into another man. Like the Moor of Venice, with whom we compared him when describing his character, deception killed all his love at a single blow, changed the entire nature of his mind,

and caused him to look upon the world as a strange region in which he had just arrived. The sole difference consisted in this—that Uncle Lucas was by idiosyncrasy less tragical, less austere, and more egotistical, than the mad sacrificer of Desdemona.

A rare but natural thing in such situations.

Doubt, or rather, hope, returned again to mortify him.

“If I were mistaken!” he thought. “If the cough came from Frasquita?”

In his tribulation the wretched man forgot that he had seen the clothes of the Corregidor hanging before the hearth, that he had found the gate and the door alike open, that he had read the evidence of his shame. He stooped down and looked through the keyhole, trembling with anxious uncertainty.

The view he obtained commanded only a small triangle of the head of the bed, but in that small triangle the end of one of the pillows, and on it the head of the Corregidor, could be discerned. The face of the miller contracted into another diabolical smile. It might have been said that he appeared to be happy again.

“I now know the truth!” he murmured quietly. And he began to return down the staircase with the same care that he had ascended it. “The affair is delicate. I must reflect. I have time for everything,” he thought as he went downstairs.

When he re-entered the kitchen he seated himself in the middle of it and hid his forehead in his hands. Thus he remained for a long time, till he was awoke from his reverie by a light blow on his foot. It was the blunderbuss that had slipped from off his knees and made this sign to him.

“No! I tell you no!” murmured Uncle Lucas, addressing the weapon. “You don’t suit me. Everybody would pity them, and they would hang me. It is a question of a Cor-

regidor, and to kill a Corregidor is still in Spain utterly inexcusable. They will say that I killed him through groundless jealousy, and that then I stripped him and put him in my bed. They will say besides that I killed my wife on mere suspicion. And they will hang me. I'm blessed if they shall do it. Moreover, I shall have given signs of possessing little intelligence—little talent, 'if at the conclusion of my life, I become an object of compassion. Everybody would laugh at me. They would say my misfortune was very natural, I being a hunchback and Frasquita being so beautiful. No! What I want is vengeance; to triumph, to despise, to laugh at everything, and so avoid any jokes at that hump, which up to the present time I have made almost enviable, and which would appear so grotesque on a scaffold."

Such was the discourse which Uncle Lucas held to himself and by virtue of his meditations he put the blunderbuss aside and began to walk up and down with his arms behind him and his head bowed, as if he were looking for vengeance on the ground, amidst the baseness of life, in some vulgar and comical stratagem that would render both his wife and the Corregidor ridiculous instead of seeking the same vengeance in slaughter in appeasing outraged honour, in pardon, or in heaven—as in his place other men of a disposition less rebellious to the dictates of nature, of society, or of their own feelings, would have done. Suddenly his eyes fell on the garments of the Corregidor.

He instantly paused. Then gradually his face became lit up with a certain glee, a delight, an air of triumph—until at last he gave way to a most frightful laugh, suppressing all noise so as not to disturb any one above stairs. At the same time he thrust his fists into his sides that he might not burst, and trembled like one in an epileptic fit,

concluding by letting himself sink into a chair until the convulsion of sarcastic rejoicing passed away. It was the very laugh of a Mephistopheles. He did not rest long, for he was soon proceeding to undress himself with feverish haste. He placed his own clothes on the same chairs on which those of the Corregidor were hanging; then put on all the garments of the latter, from the buckled shoes to the three-cornered hat; he girded on the sword, enveloped himself in the red cloak, took the stick and the gloves, and went forth from the mill walking in the direction of the city, balancing himself in the peculiar fashion of Don Eugenio de Zuñiga, and muttering to himself from time to time this phrase, which epitomised all his thoughts:

“The Corregidor’s wife is pretty as well as mine.”

XXI.

ON GUARD, SIR!

LET us now abandon Uncle Lucas, and inform ourselves of what had transpired at the mill since we left Frasquita there alone till her husband returned to it, and found such stupendous changes there. An hour might have passed after Lucas went away with Toñuelo, when the afflicted Navarrese—who had proposed to herself not to go to bed before her husband returned, and who was knitting in their bed-room, situated on the upper floor—heard some piteous cries outside the house, not far from the channel of the mill stream.

“Help! I am drowning! Frasquita! Frasquita!” exclaimed a man’s voice, with all the accents of despair.

“If it were Lucas!” thought the Navarrese, full of a terror which it is unnecessary to describe.

In the bedroom there was a small door, of which Garduña had already spoken, and which opened upon the mill dam. Frasquita unfastened it without hesitation, inasmuch as she had not recognised the voice that was imploring her help, and found herself face to face with the Corregidor, who at that moment emerged from the sluice, dripping wet.

"May heaven forgive me," stammered the infamous old fellow, "I thought that I was drowning."

"What! is it you? What is the matter? How dare you? Why do you come here at this time?" cried Frasquita, with more indignation than fright, but receding mechanically.

"Silence! Silence, woman!" stammered the Corregidor, stealing into the room behind her. "I tell you I was near being drowned. The water was carrying me away like a feather. Look at my clothes!"

"Be off! Be off from here!" replied Frasquita, with greater vehemence. "You have nothing to explain to me. I understand it all too well. What would it matter to me if you were drowned? Did I send for you? What infamy! For this you have had my husband taken off!"

"Woman, listen!"

"I will not listen! Go away directly, Señor Corregidor. Go away, or I will not be responsible for your life!"

"What do you say?"

"What you hear. My husband is not in the house, but I am sufficient of myself to make it respected. Go away where you came from, unless you wish me to throw you into the water again with my own hands!"

"Hush! hush! Do not cry out so loudly; I am not deaf!" exclaimed the old libertine. "If I am here, it is with some reason. I came to free Uncle Lucas, whom a mayor has had arrested by a mistake. But, first of all, I must have my clothes dried. I am wet to the skin."

"I tell you to be off!"

"Silence, fool! You don't know what you are saying. Look! Here I have the nomination of your nephew. Light a fire, and let us speak together. For the rest, whilst my clothes are drying I will lie down in this bed."

"It is so, is it? You declare that you are come here for my sake? For this you have had my Lucas arrested? You bring me the nomination, do you? Gracious heaven! What does the ugly wretch take me for?"

"Frasquita, I am the Corregidor!"

"If you were the King it would be the same to me. I am the wife of my husband and the mistress of my house. Do you think that I am afraid of Corregidores? I can go to Madrid and the end of the world to demand justice against the impertinent old wretch who thus abuses his authority. And to-morrow morning I will put on my mantle and go and see your wife."

"You will not do so," replied the Corregidor, losing his temper or changing his tactics. "You will do nothing of the kind, for I will shoot you if I find you do not listen to reason."

"Shoot me?" exclaimed Señá Frásquita in a hollow voice.

"Shoot you, yes; and no harm would result to me. I left word in the city that I should be out to-night after some criminals, so don't be a fool, and love me, as I adore you."

"Señor Corregidor, you will shoot me?" again said the Navarrese, throwing her arms behind her and inclining her body forward, as if to throw herself on her adversary.

"If you touch me I will shoot you, and I shall thus find myself free from your threats and from your beauty," responded the Corregidor, alarmed, and pulling out a pair of pocket pistols.

"Pistols, too, and in your other pocket the nomination of

my nephew," said Señá Frasquita, nodding her head up and down. "Then, Señor, my decision is no longer doubtful. Wait a moment till I light a fire." And thus speaking, she hastened towards the staircase and descended it in three bounds.

The Corregidor took the light and followed the miller's wife, fearing that she might escape, but he was obliged to descend much less quickly, and when he arrived at the kitchen he stumbled against the Navarrese, who was returning to seek him. "

"So you said you were going to shoot me," exclaimed that indomitable woman, taking a step backwards. "Then, on guard, sir! for I am so already."

As she spoke she thrust in his face the formidable blunderbuss that plays such a notable part in this story.

"Hold, miserable woman! What are you going to do?" cried the Corregidor, almost dead with fright. "My shooting you was all a joke. Look, the pistols are not loaded. But, what I said of the nomination is true. Here, take it—I make you a present of it gratis; yes, for nothing. It is yours!" And with trembling hands he placed it on the table.

"Ah! that's well!" said the Navarrese. "To-morrow it will serve to light the fire when I cook my husband's breakfast. I do not want anything from you, and if my nephew comes here it will be to trample on the ugly hand that has written his name on that vile paper. I tell you again, go out of this house; out, quickly! My monkey is getting up."

The Corregidor made no reply to this address. He had become livid, almost blue, his eyes seemed to be starting out of his head, and an ague-like trembling shook his whole body. At last his teeth began to chatter, and he sunk on the ground, seized with a convulsive fit. The fright which his falling into

the sluice had given him, the thorough wetting of all his clothes, the violent scene in the bed-room, and the fear of the blunderbuss, which the Navarrese pointed at him, had completely exhausted the strength of the weak old fellow.

"I am dying," he stammered. "Call Garduña. He is outside—by the river bank. I must not die in this house." He closed his eyes and remained as if dead.

"He will die as he says," exclaimed Frasquita. "But this is the blackest trick of all. What shall I do with this man in my house? What would they say of me if he should die? What would Lucas say? How shall I be able to justify myself, when it was I who opened the door to him? Oh, no! I must not remain here with him. I must go in search of my husband. I must cause a scandal rather than compromise my honour."

HAVING taken this resolution, she put down the blunderbuss, went to the yard, caught the donkey there, harnessed it after a fashion, opened the outer gate, mounted the animal with a bound, and went towards where Garduña had been left standing.

"Garduña! Garduña!" she cried, as she approached the spot.

"Here I am," replied the constable, appearing from behind a fence. "Is it you, Señá Frasquita?"

"Yes, it is I. Go to the mill and help your master, who is dying."

"What do you say?"

"What you hear."

"And you? Where are you going at this hour?"

"I—I am going to the city for a doctor. Get out of the road!" replied Señá Frasquita, giving her donkey a dig with her heel, and Garduña a kick on the chest. But she took the road to the village where her husband had gone with Toñuelo, and not the road to the city, as she had just said was her intention.

Garduña did not notice this last circumstance, but at once made for the mill, taking enormous strides and muttering to himself as he went :

"Gone for a doctor ! She cannot do more. But he is a weak old wight. What an occasion to become ill ! Heaven gives dainties to those who cannot eat them."

XXII.

GARDUÑA MULTIPLIES HIMSELF.

WHEN Garduña reached the mill the Corregidor was beginning to recover consciousness, and was trying to raise himself from the ground, while by his side was the lamp that his worship had brought downstairs from the bedroom.

"Has she gone away ?" was the first phrase uttered by Don Eugenio.

"Who ?"

"That demon ; I mean the miller's wife."

"Yes, Señor, she has gone ; and I don't think she was in a very good temper."

"Ah ! Garduña, I am dying."

"But what is the matter ?"

"I have fallen into the sluice and am soaked through. My bones are aching with cold."

"Well, well, I'll soon put you to rights."

"Garduña, take care what you are saying."

"I am saying nothing, Señor."

"Well, well, get me out of this mess."

"Directly, Señor. You will see that I'll arrange everything in a trice."

Thus spoke the officer ; and he instantly took up the lamp

with one hand while he placed the other under the Corregidor's arm, then led him to the bedroom, stripped him stark naked, put him to bed; got an armful of wood, went to the kitchen, made a great fire; brought down his master's clothes, placed them on the backs of several chairs; lit a second lamp, hung it on a nail of the dresser, and again ascended the stairs to the bedroom.

"How are we getting on!" he asked Don Eugenio, raising the lamp to observe his face.

"Admirably. I think I am getting in a perspiration. To-morrow I shall hang you, Garduña."

"Why, Señor."

"Do you dare to ask me? Do you think that, following out the plan that you traced, I expected to lie down alone in this bed, after receiving the sacrament of baptism for the second time. To-morrow I will certainly hang you."

"But tell me all about it. Señá Frasquita——"

"Señá Frasquita has tried to assassinate me; that is all I've obtained from your counsels. I tell you I will hang you to-morrow morning."

"Something less than that, Señor Corregidor."

"Why so, impertinent? Because you see me here, prostrate?"

"No, Señor. I say so because Señá Frasquita has not shown herself so inhuman as your worship relates, since she has gone to the city to procure a doctor."

"Just heaven! Are you sure that she has gone to the city?" exclaimed Don Eugenio, more overcome than ever.

"At least, she told me so."

"Run, run, Garduña! Oh! I am lost, without any hope! Do you know why she has gone to the city? To relate everything to my wife; to tell her that I am here! Oh! good heavens! How could I have expected that? I thought

she would go to the village in search of her husband, and, as I have him there well looked after, her journey didn't trouble me. But to go to the city ! Garduña, run, run, and prevent my ruin ! Prevent her from entering my house."

"And your worship will not hang me if I succeed in doing so !"

"On the contrary, I will make you a present of a pair of shoes in very good condition, which are too big for me. There, I will give you whatever you ask."

"Then I will fly ! Sleep quietly, your worship. Within half-an-hour I shall be back, after seeing the Navarrese safe in prison. I think I can go a little more swiftly than a donkey." Garduña then disappeared.

It was during the officer's absence that the miller looked through the key-hole, and saw what we have already described

Let us now leave the Corregidor perspiring in his strange bed, and Garduña running towards the city, where Lucas was soon to follow him, with the adornments of a three-cornered hat and a scarlet cloak ; and, having given ourselves wings, we will fly in the direction of the village, in pursuit of the valourous Señá Frasquita.

XXIII.

AGAIN THE DESERT AND THE VOICES.

THE only adventure that befel the Navarrese on her journey from the mill to the village, was a little fright that she experienced at observing some one strike a light in the middle of a field path.

"If it should be one of the Corregidor's constables about

to stop me," thought the miller's wife. Then there was a braying at the same spot. "Donkeys in the field at this hour!" continued Frasquita to herself. "There is no farm or cottage about here; phantoms are having it all their own way to-night." At this moment her own animal thought it opportune to bray in reply.

"Silence, wretch!" said the Navarrese, sticking a pin into her steed. And fearing she might meet with some one whom she would rather not encounter, she guided the beast off from the road and made it trot along the bye-paths.

But she was soon tranquillized on perceiving that the man who struck the light, and the donkey who first brayed, constituted a single entity, and that this entity had disappeared, flying in a direction contrary to the one she was taking.

"A greater coward than I am is there!" she exclaimed, smiling at her own and the stranger's fears.

And without any other accident she arrived at the village by half-past eleven o'clock.

XXIV.

A KING OF THAT TIME.

THE Mayor was fast asleep, his back towards that of his better-half, thus forming the well-known figure of the Austrian eagle with two heads, when Toñuelo knocked at the door of the nuptial chamber, and informed Señor Juan Lopez that Seña Frasquita, the mistress of the mill, wished to speak to him.

We do not purpose to mention all the grumbling and swearing that accompanied the acts of awakening and dress-

ing on the part of the Mayor, but we will pass at once to the moment when the miller's wife saw him, stretching his limbs like a gymnast exercising his muscles, and exclaiming in the middle of an interminable yawn :

"I hope you are well, Señá Frasquita ; but what brings you here ? Did not Toñuelo tell you to remain at the mill ? Do you disobey authority in this manner ?"

"I want to see my Lucas !" replied the Navarrese ; "I must see him directly. Let him be told his wife is here ; I must see him." "

"I must ! I must ! Señora, do you forget that you are speaking to the King ?"

"Don't talk to me of your kings, Señor Juan ; I am not here to be laughed at. You know too well what has happened to me. You know too well why my husband has been arrested."

"I know nothing, Señá Frasquita. And in regard to your husband he is not arrested, but is sleeping as tranquilly as if he were in his own house, and is treated as I always treat my guests. Toñuelo, go to the loft and tell Uncle Lucas to wake up, and come here at once. Now, Señora, tell me all that has taken place. Were you afraid to sleep alone ?

"Do not be so shameless, Señor Juan. You know very well that your jokes are not to my taste. What has happened to me is very simple. You and the Señor Corregidor have tried to ruin me, but have been disappointed. I am here without needing to blush, and the Señor Corregidor remains in the mill in an almost dying condition."

"The Corregidor dying ! Señora, do you know what you are saying ?"

"What you hear. He has fallen into the sluice and almost drowned himself, or got a cold on his lungs, or I

know not what. But that is a matter for his wife. I come in search of my husband, and intend to go to-morrow morning to Madrid, where I shall relate all that has occurred to the King."

"The deuce!" murmured Juan. "Here, Manuela, girl, go and harness the mule. Señá Frasquita, I am going to the mill. It will be a bad thing for you if you've done the Señor Corregidor any harm."

"Señor Mayor! Señor Mayor!" exclaimed Toñuelo, entering the room more dead than alive, "Uncle Lucas is not in the loft. His donkey is gone from the stable, and the yard-door is open, so that the bird has flown!"

"What do you say?" cried Señor Juan Lopez.

"Holy Virgin! What awful things are now happening in my house!" exclaimed Frasquita. "Make haste, Señor Mayor, let us lose no time. My husband will kill the Corregidor if he finds him there at this time of night."

"Then you think that Uncle Lucas is at the mill?"

"Have I any reason not to think so? I say more. When I was coming here I passed him on the road without knowing it. It was he, no doubt, who struck a light in the middle of the path. Good heavens! When one thinks that animals have more intelligence than human beings! For you must know, Señor Juan, that our two donkeys recognised and saluted each other, whilst my Lucas and I neither saluted nor recognised each other."

"Bother your Lucas! But now let us be off," said the Mayor, "and then we shall see what is to be done with you all. No one shall play tricks with me. I am the King! But not a King like the one we have now in Madrid, but like him at Seville, who was called Don Pedro the Cruel. Come, Manuela, bring me my stick, and tell your mistress that I am going out."

The servant, who was certainly a prettier girl than either the Mayor's wife or public morals approved of, obeyed, and, as the mule was already harnessed, Señor Juan and Frasquita set out for the mill, followed by the indispensable Toñuelo.

XXV.

GARDUÑA'S STAR.

LET us precede them, bearing in mind that we have the right to travel more quickly than any one else.

Garduña had already returned to the mill, after having searched for Señá Frasquita through all the streets of the city.

The astute officer had called on his way at the Corregidor's residence, where he found everything quiet. The doors were open as in the middle of the day, as was the custom when the authority was exercising his sacred functions abroad. On the staircase landing and in an ante-chamber various officials were asleep, waiting for their master ; but, on hearing Garduña arrive, two or three of them roused themselves, and asked their immediate chief :

"Is the Señor coming !"

"No ; be quiet. I have come to see if anything has happened in the house"

"Nothing."

"And the Señora ?"

"Retired to her apartment."

"Hasn't a woman come in this way a little while ago ?"

"No one has been here all the night."

"Then don't let any one enter, whoever he may be and whatever he may say. On the contrary, if any one comes and

asks for the Corregidor or his lady, seize him and take him off to prison."

"It seems that to-night you are after some birds of consequence," said one of the constables.

"Big game," added another.

"Very big," replied Garduña, solemnly. "You may suppose that the affair is very delicate, seeing that the Corregidor and I are doing the hunting by ourselves. Well, good-bye for the present."

"Good-bye," they all replied, saluting Garduña.

"My star is becoming eclipsed," murmured the latter, on leaving the Corregidor's residence. "Even women take me in now. The miller's wife has gone to the village in search of her husband instead of going to the city. Poor Garduña, what has become of your scent?" And talking to himself in this way, he took the road back to the mill.

The officer had good reason to complain of the loss of his old powers of scent, for he did not notice a certain individual who was hiding himself at that moment behind some osiers at a short distance from the city, and muttering these words within his scarlet cloak :

"Take care, my boy ; here comes Garduña. He must not see me."

It was Uncle Lucas, dressed as the Corregidor, going towards the city, repeating from time to time his diabolical phrase,

"The Corregidor's wife is pretty as well as mine."

Garduña passed without seeing him, and the false Corregidor left his hiding-place and entered the town. Soon afterwards the officer arrived at the mill, as we have already indicated.

XXVI.

REACTION.

THE Corregidor was still in bed, just as Uncle Lucas had seen him through the keyhole.

"What a good sweating I have had, Garduña! It has saved me from an illness," he exclaimed as soon as his myrmidon entered the room. "And Señá Frasquita? Have you got her? Has she come with you? Has she spoken to my wife?"

"The miller's wife, Señor," answered Garduña bitterly, "has deceived me like the idiot I am, and has without doubt gone to the village in search of her spouse. Pardon my dullness."

"That is still better," said the Corregidor, whose eyes shone with devilish malignity. "All is saved, then! Before morning Señá Frasquita and Uncle Lucas shall be on their way to the prison of the Inquisition, tied tail to tail, and will there rot without being able to relate their night's adventures to any one. Bring me my clothes, Garduña; they must be dry by this time. Bring them to me quick and help to dress me. The lover will soon transform himself into a Corregidor."

Garduña went down to the kitchen for Don Eugenio's clothes.

XXVII.

IN THE KING'S NAME.

In the meanwhile, Señá Frasquita, Señor Juan Lopez, and Toñuelo were making their way towards the mill, where they arrived a few minutes afterwards.

"I will enter first," exclaimed the Mayor; "I am the law! Follow me, Toñuelo; and you, Señá Frasquita, wait at the door till I call you."

Señor Juan Lopez then entered the yard and saw by the light of the moon a man almost hump-backed, dressed like the miller in a jacket and breeches of grey cloth, a black sash, blue stockings, a plush cap, and a cloak thrown over his shoulders.

"It is he!" cried the Mayor. "In the King's name surrender yourself, Uncle Lucas!"

The man tried to retire into the mill.

"Give yourself up," cried Toñuelo in his turn, throwing himself upon him and seizing him by the neck, whilst he applied his knees to the poor man's spine and brought him to the earth. At the same time, another kind of wild animal leaped upon Toñuelo, and, seizing him by the waist, pulled him to the ground and began striking him all over. It was Señá Frasquita, who exclaimed:

"Wretch! leave go of my Lucas."

Upon this, another individual, who appeared on the scene leading a donkey by the bridle, placed himself between the two and tried to save Toñuelo. It was Garduña, who, taking the village constable for Don Eugenio de Zuñiga, said to the miller's wife:

"Señora, respect my master." And then he pushed her down in turn on her back upon the top of the other constable.

Seña Frasquita, finding herself between two fires, gave Garduña such a kick in the stomach that he fell plump on the ground. So, including him, there were now four persons down. Señor Juan Lopez, in the meantime, prevented the supposed Uncle Lucas from rising by planting a foot on his ribs.

"Garduña ! help ! In the name of the King ! I am the Corregidor," he cried at last, finding that the Mayor's hoof, shod with stout oxhide, was beginning to smash his side in.

"The Corregidor ! can it be true," said Señor Juan Lopez in a state of terror.

"The Corregidor !" repeated all present.

And in a very short time they were all standing on their legs.

"To prison, every one of you !" exclaimed Don Eugenio de Zuñiga. "Everybody to the scaffold !"

"But, Señor," said Señor Juan, throwing himself on his knees, "won't your worship pardon me for having unknowingly ill-treated you ? How could I recognise your worship in that common attire ?"

"Barbarian !" replied the Corregidor. "I was forced to put some clothes or other on. Don't you know that mine have been stolen. Don't you know that a gang of thieves headed by Uncle Lucas——"

"You lie," cried the Navarrese.

"Listen to me, Seña Frasquita, said Garduña, drawing her on one side. "If you don't put things right he will hang us all, beginning with Uncle Lucas,"

"But whatever has happened !" asked Seña Frasquita.

"Uncle Lucas is going about the city dressed as the Corregidor ; and God knows but he may have arrived in his disguise even at the sleeping apartment of the Corregidor's lady." Then the officer told her in four words all that we already know.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Frasquita. "Then my husband believes me dishonoured; and has gone to the city to avenge himself! Let us hasten there that I may be justified in the eyes of my Lucas."

"Yes; let us go to the city and prevent him from speaking to my wife and relating to her all the absurdities which he may have imagined," said the Corregidor, trying to scramble upon one of the donkeys. "Just help me to mount, Señor Mayor."

"Let us go to the city," added Garduña, "and may it have pleased heaven, Señor Corregidor, that Uncle Lucas has contented himself with merely speaking to the Señora."

"What do you say, wretch!" interrupted Don Eugenio. "Do you believe he is capable——"

"Of anything," replied Señá Frasquita.

XXVIII.

"AVE MARIA PURISSIMA! HALF-PAST TWELVE AND A CALM NIGHT."

SUCH was the cry of the night watchman, as the miller's wife and the Corregidor, each riding on one of the miller's donkeys, Señor Juan Lopez on his mule, and the two constables on foot, arrived at the door of the Corregidor's abode. The door was closed. It might have been said that both the government and the governed had done work for that day.

"Bad," thought Garduña, who knocked two or three times. A long interval elapsed, but the door was not opened, nor any answer given.

Señá Frasquita became paler than wax. The Corregidor

had already half bitten off the finger nails of both hands. No one said a word.

Bang! bang! bang! Blows and more blows were successively applied to the door of the Corregidor's house by the two constables, and by Señor Juan Lopez. But nothing came of them. No one replies; no one opens. Not a fly is heard moving. All that was audible was the low murmur of a fountain in the courtyard. So passed a few minutes which appeared long as eternity.

At last, about one o'clock, a small window on the second floor was opened, and a feminine voice cried :

"Who is it?"

"That's the nurse," murmured Garduña.

"I," replied Don Eugenio. "Open!"

An instant of silence ensued.

"And who are you?" asked the nurse.

"Why, can't you hear? I am the master, the Corregidor!"

There was another pause.

"Good-night to you," replied the good woman. "My master came home an hour ago, and went to bed at once. You go to bed yourselves, and sleep off the wine you've got in your skins."

The window was closed suddenly; and Señá Frasquita covered her face with her hands.

"Nurse!" roared the Corregidor, almost beside himself.

"Do you not hear me telling you to open the door? Do you want me to hang you as well as the others?"

The window was again opened.

"But let me see," said the nurse. "Who are you to be shouting out like that?"

"I am the Corregidor!"

"What a fib! Didn't I tell you that the Señor Corregidor came home before twelve o'clock, and that I saw

him with my own eyes shut himself up in mistress's room. Do you want to make game of me? Only wait a moment, and you shall have something."

At the same instant, the door was suddenly opened, and a dark cloud of servants and constables, armed with cudgels, rushed upon the individuals outside, exclaiming furiously:

"Now, then, where is the rascal calling himself the Corregidor? Where is the joker, the drunkard?"

There was a tremendous fight of demons in the obscurity, without any one knowing who was who, and the Corregidor, Garduña, Señor Juan, and Toñuelo all came in for their share of blows.

It was the second beating that the night's adventure had cost Don Eugenio, besides the sousing in the water at the mill.

Seña Frasquita, who had separated herself from the combatants, wept for the first time in her life.

"Lucas! Lucas!" she said, "and you have doubted me; and are clasping another in your arms. Ah! there is no cure for our misfortune."

XXIX.

THE MOON COMES FROM BEHIND THE CLOUDS.

"WHAT scandal is this?" suddenly exclaimed a calm voice, of majestic and gracious tone, which sounded above all the din. Those outside the house raised their heads and saw a woman dressed in black on the principal balcony of the building.

"The mistress," said the servants, suspending operations.

"My wife," stammered Don Eugenio.

"Let the gentlemen come in. The Señor Corregidor says that he permits it," added the lady.

The servants gave way, and Zuñiga and his companions entered the house and proceeded up the back staircase. No culprit has ever ascended the scaffold with a less secure step and more trembling mien than the Corregidor mounted his own stairs. The idea of his possible dishonour grieved him more than all the misfortunes of the night, and than even the ridiculous situation in which he found himself.

Before everything, he thought to himself, "I am a Zuñiga and a Ponce de Leon! Woe to those who have forgotten it! Woe to my wife if she has dishonored my name!"

XXX.

AN ARISTOCRATIC LADY.

THE Corregidor's wife received her husband and his rustic suite in the principal room of the house. She was alone, standing, and had her eyes fixed on the door. She was a very grand lady, still youthful, of placid and severe beauty, more fit for the Christian pencil than the Heathen chisel, and was attired with all the nobility and seriousness that the taste of the period permitted. Her dress, made with a short and tight skirt, and puffed and slashed sleeves, was of black bombazine; a lace neckerchief, of a yellowish tinge, covered her admirable shoulders, and long mittens, of black tulle, the greater part of her alabaster arms. She was majestically fanning herself with a large fan from the Phillipine Isles, and held in her other hand a lace handkerchief, the four corners of which dangled, with a symmetrical regularity, that accorded with her attitude and her slightest movements.

This beautiful woman, who might have been a Queen or an Abbess, inspired respect and esteem in all who regarded her. Besides, the splendour of her attire at such an hour, the gravity of her mien, and the many lights that shone in the room proved that the Corregidor's wife had sought to give to the scene a theatrical solemnity, and also a ceremonial tone, contrasting with the gross and vulgar character of her husband's adventure.

In conclusion, let us mention that this lady was called Doña Mercedes Carvillo de Albornoz y Espinosa de los Menteros, and was the descendant of the most illustrious warriors the city had produced. Her family, for motives of worldly vanity, had induced her to marry the old and wealthy Corregidor, and she, who otherwise would have been a nun, for her natural inclination drew her towards the cloisters, consented to that dolorous sacrifice. But let us return to our tale.

XXXI.

TIT-FOR-TAT.

As soon as the Corregidor appeared before his wife, he exclaimed:

"Mercedes, I wish to know immediately——"

"What, Uncle Lucas, you here!" interrupted his lady.

"Has some misfortune happened at the mill?"

"Señora, I am not to be trifled with," replied the Corregidor, who looked as savage as a wild animal. "Before entering into explanations on my side, I want to know what has become of my honour?"

"That is not my affair; did you deposit it with me?" calmly asked Doña Mercedes.

"Yes, Señora, with you," replied Don Eugenio. "Women are the depositaries of the honour of their husbands."

"Then ask your wife for it; she is listening to us." And Señá Frasquita, who had remained at the door of the room, gave vent to a kind of roar. "Come in, Señora, and sit down," added the Corregidor's lady, addressing herself to the Navarrese with majestic dignity. And, as she spoke, she herself took a place upon the sofa.

The generous Frasquita could then understand all the grandeur of the action of the injured wife—doubly injured, perchance, and raising herself to an equal height, she overcame her native impetuosity, and preserved a dolorous silence. It is not necessary to say that, secure of her own innocence and strength, Señá Frasquita was in no hurry to defend herself. She had accusations to make, and many; but certainly not against the Corregidor's lady. It was with Uncle Lucas she wished to settle accounts, and Uncle Lucas was not there.

"Señá Frasquita," repeated the noble lady, seeing that the Navarrese had not moved a jot, "I told you you could come in and sit down."

This second invitation was made with a voice more affectionate and sympathetic than at first. It might be said that the Corregidor's wife, on observing the quiet mien, and almost matchless feminine beauty of the other woman, had divined by instinct that she had not to do with a low and contemptible being, but rather with one unfortunate like herself—unfortunate, yes, by the mere fact of having known the Corregidor. The two women, who had considered themselves rivals, exchanged glances of peace and pardon, and noted, with astonishment, that their hearts met in mutual sympathy, like those of two sisters who recognized one another. Enjoying these sweet emotions, the miller's wife

swept majestically into the room, and seated herself on the edge of a chair. While at the mill, anticipating that she might have to make some visits of importance in the city, she had adjusted her toilette, and put on a deeply fringed black woollen mantilla that became her divinely. She seemed quite a lady.

As regards the Corregidor, he had kept silence during this episode. Frasquita's outcry, and her appearance on the scene, could not do less than startle him. She caused him more terror than his wife.

"Come, Uncle Lucas," continued Doña Mercedes, addressing her husband. "Here you have Señá Frasquita. Will you state your business?"

"Mercedes," cried the Corregidor, "by the keys of heaven, it is clear that you don't know what I am capable of! Again I conjure you to put joking aside and tell me all that has passed during my absence. Where is that man?"

"Who? my husband? He is getting up, and will soon be here.

"Getting up!" roared Don Eugenio.

"You are astonished? Then, where do you think a good man should be at this time of night, if not in his own house, in his own bed, and sleeping with his legitimate spouse, as God orders."

"Mercedes, think of what you are saying. Do not forget that others hear us. Do not forget that I am the Corregidor!"

"Do not raise your voice to me like that, Uncle Lucas, or I will give orders to have you taken off to prison," replied the Corregidor's wife rising.

"I to prison!—I, the Corregidor of the city!"

"The Corregidor of the city, the representative of justice, the deputy of the King," replied the great lady with a

severity and an energy which drowned the voice of the false miller, "arrived at his house at the proper time, to rest from the noble duties of his office, so that he might to-morrow continue to protect the honour and the lives of the citizens, the sanctity of their domestic hearths, and the modesty of women; thus preventing any one from being able to enter, disguised as a Corregidor or otherwise, into the bedroom of a strange woman, from surprising virtue in its careless repose, from abusing its chaste sleep."

"Mercedes! What is it that you are saying?" hissed out the Corregidor. "If it is true that this has occurred in my house, I say you are a vile, perfidious, licentious woman."

"To whom is this man speaking?" interrupted the Corregidor's wife disdainfully, and looking at those present. "Who is this fool? Who is this drunkard? I cannot believe that he is a respected miller like Uncle Lucas, although he is dressed in his peasant's clothes. Señor Juan Lopez, believe me," she continued, addressing the terrified Alcalde, "my husband, the Corregidor of the city, arrived at this house two hours ago, with his three-cornered hat, his scarlet mantle, his sword, and his stick. The servants and officers who are now listening to me, rose and saluted him as he passed through the portal up the staircase, and into the ante-room. All the doors were immediately closed, and since that time no one has penetrated to my hearth except you. Is it so? Answer there!"

"Is it true, it is quite true," replied the nurse, the servants, and the officers, all of whom, grouped near the door, were present at this singular scene.

"Get out of here, everybody!" cried Don Eugenio, foaming at the mouth. "Garduña! Garduña! arrest those vile people who fail to treat me with respect. To prison, to the scaffold with them!" But Garduña did not put in an appearance.

"Besides, Señor," continued Doña Mercedes, changing her tone and deigning to look at her husband, and to treat him as such, fearful lest joking should reach an irremediable extreme, "suppose that you are my husband. Suppose that you are Don Eugenio y Zuñiga y Ponce de Leon——"

"I am."

"Suppose, besides, that some blame rests on me for having mistaken for you a man who entered my chamber dressed as the Corregidor."

"Infamous!" cried out the old fellow; putting his hand where his sword should have been, but finding only the sash of a Murcian miller.

The Navarrese covered her face with the border of her mantilla to hide the tears of jealousy in her eyes.

"Let us suppose whatever you like," continued Doña Mercedes, with unmistakeable impassibility. "But tell me this, sir, have you any right to complain? Can you accuse me as a prosecutor? Can you sentence me as a judge? Do you come, perchance, from hearing a sermon? Or from confession? Or mass? And where do you come from in that dress? And with that lady? Where have you passed the half of this night?"

"Excuse me," began Señá Frasquita, suddenly rising up as if impelled by a spring, and boldly intervening between the Corregidor and his wife.

The former, who had been about to speak, remained with open mouth at seeing the Navarrese interfere. But Doña Mercedes anticipated her and said:

"Señora, do not fatigue yourself to give me explanations. I do not ask you for them; but here comes someone who has a right to do so. Settle the matter with him."

At this moment the door of an inner room opened, and Uncle Lucas made his appearance, dressed as the Corregidor

from head to foot, with stick, gloves, and sword, as if he were presenting himself at a meeting of the corporation.

XXXII.

FAITH MOVES MOUNTAINS.

"I wish you all a very good evening," said the last arrival taking off his three-cornered hat, and speaking in a smothered voice, like Don Eugenio de Zuñiga. Then he advanced further into the room, rocking himself from side to side, and kissed the hand of the Corregidor's wife.

All stood aghast. The resemblance of Uncle Lucas to the true Corregidor was marvellous. The servants and even Señor Juan Lopez were unable to suppress a burst of laughter.

Don Eugenio keenly felt this fresh insult, and rushed upon Uncle Lucas like a basilisk. But Frasquita's muscular arm pushed him aside; and to avoid another push and consequent jeer, his lordship drew back without saying a word. It was evident that this woman was born to tame the poor old man.

Uncle Lucas turned paler than death when he saw his wife approach him; but he immediately recovered himself, and smiling horribly and putting his hand to his heart as if to prevent it from falling to pieces, said while still imitating the Corregidor: .

"God preserve you! Señá Frasquita! may I ask if you have sent the nomination to your nephew?"

You should have seen the Navarrese, when she heard these words. She threw back her mantilla, raised her head with the pride of a lioness, and fixing two eyes like poniards on the false Corregidor, said in his face:

"I despise you, Lucas!"

All present thought she had spat on him. The gesture, the mien, the tone of voice, accentuated the phrase.

On hearing his wife's voice, the countenance of the miller underwent a transformation. A kind of inspiration, like that of religious faith, penetrated his soul, flooding it with light and joy. Thus it was that, forgetting for a moment all he had seen and fancied he had seen at the mill, he exclaimed with tears in his eyes and sincerity on his lips:

"Then you are still my Frasquita?"

"No!" replied the Navarrese, beside herself. "I am no longer your Frasquita. I am—— Ask it of your actions to-night, and they will tell you what you have done with that heart which loved you so much!"

She burst into tears.

The Corregidor's wife advanced towards Frasquita, and, without being able to restrain herself, clasped her in her arms with the greatest tenderness.

Señora Frasquita kissed her, without, however, knowing what she did; and, like a sobbing child that clings to her mother, stammered out:

"Señora! Señora! how wretched I am!"

"Not so wretched as you imagine," replied the Corregidor's wife, who began to cry also.

"It is I who am wretched!" groaned Uncle Lucas, wiping away his tears, as if he were ashamed of shedding them.

"And I!" broke forth Don Eugenio, softened by the contagion of tears, or hoping to get out of trouble by the same humid way—I mean by the way of tears. "Yes, it is true! I am indeed a bad one! A monster! A dissolute fellow who has at last got his deserts!" And he broke out into a melancholy bellow, clinging to the person of Señor Juan Lopez.

The latter, and all the servants, wept in like manner ; and at last everything seemed to be quite settled, although, in fact, no explanations whatever had been given.

XXXIII.

AND YOU ?

UNCLE LUCAS was the first who ceased to float in the sea of tears. Doubtless ~~he~~ he began to recall what he had seen through the keyhole.

"Señores, let us settle accounts," he said.

"There are no accounts to be settled, Uncle Lucas," exclaimed the Corregidor's wife. "Your wife is an angel !"

"Yes ; but——"

"No buts. Let her speak, and you will see how she will justify herself. Ever since I saw her my heart has told me that she was a saint, notwithstanding all you have related to me."

"Well, let her speak," said Uncle Lucas.

"I'm not going to speak," replied his wife, who, however, stammered forth, "It is you who ought to speak out ; for the truth is that you are——"

But Señá Frasquita said no more, owing to the invincible respect that the Corregidor's wife inspired in her.

"But you ?" asked Uncle Lucas, again losing faith.

"The question is not about her," cried the Corregidor, whose jealousy was returning. "It is about you and this lady. Oh, Mercedes ! what have you to say ?"

"And you ?" interrupted his wife, measuring him with her eyes from head to foot.

And during some moments the two repeated a hundred times the same phrases :

"But you?"

"Well, but you?"

"No; you."

"But how could you?" &c., &c.

The interrogations would have been continued for ever had not the Corregidor's wife at last said:

"Hold; be silent now. We will discuss our affairs later on. What is at present urgent is to restore peace to the heart of Uncle Lucas—a very easy thing in my judgment; for I see Señor Juan Lopez and Toñuelo there, eager to justify Señá Frasquita."

"It is not necessary for men to justify me," said the latter. "I have two witnesses of greater credit, whom it cannot be said I have seduced or suborned."

"And where are they?" said the miller.

"They are below, at the door."

"Then, with this lady's permission, tell them to come up."

"The poor creatures cannot do so."

"Oh! they are two women? Come, that's credible testimony, indeed!"

"They are not two women—they are only two females."

"Worse and worse. They must be two children. Do me the favour to mention their names."

"One is called 'Pinono' and the other 'Liviana.'"

"Our two donkeys! Frasquita, are you laughing at me?"

"No I am speaking very seriously. I can prove to you by the testimony of our donkeys that I was not in the mill when you saw the Señor Corregidor there."

"Good heavens! Explain."

"Hear me, Lucas, and die of shame for having doubted my honour. Whilst you were coming from the village to our house, I was on my way from our house to the village;

and consequently we crossed on the road. But you were not in the roadway, you had stopped to strike a light in the middle of a side path."

"It is quite true that I stopped. Continue."

"Thereupon your donkey brayed."

"Just so. Ah! how happy I am! Speak! speak! Each of your words adds a year to my life."

"And the one in the road replied to the braying."

"Yes, yes! It seems to me as if I were hearing it."

"They were Livia and Pinono recognising and saluting one another like good friends, whilst we two neither recognised nor saluted——"

"Don't say any more! don't say any more!"

"As we did not recognise one another," continued Señá Frasquita, "we both were frightened and fled in contrary directions. You see, now, I was not in the mill. If you want to know how it was you found the Señor Corregidor in our bed, feel the clothes you are wearing, which are still damp, and they will tell you better than I. His worship fell into the water at the mill, and Garduña undressed him and put him to bed. If you wish to know why I opened the door, it was because I thought it was you who were drowning and calling for help. And, last of all, if you want to know all about the nomination——but I have no more to say for the present. When we are alone, I will inform you of that and other particulars, which I ought not to mention before this lady."

"All what Señá Frasquita has said is the pure truth," cried Señor Juan Lopez, desiring to ingratiate himself with Doña Mercedes, as he saw it was she who commanded at the Corregidor's.

"All! All!" added Toñuelo, following in the wake of his master.

"Up to the present, all!" added the Corregidor, very pleased that the explanations of the Navarrese had gone no farther.

"Then you are innocent!" exclaimed Uncle Lucas, yielding to overwhelming evidence. "My Frasquita! Frasquita of my soul, pardon the injustice I have done you and let us embrace."

But his wife drew herself back and said :

"That is a horse of another colour. Before I embrace you, I want to hear *your* explanations."

"I will give them for myself and for him," said Doña Mercedes.

"I've been expecting them for the last hour," threw in the Corregidor, pulling himself up.

"But I will not give them," continued the lady, looking disdainfully at her husband, "until these gentlemen have changed clothes, and, even then, I will give them only to those who have a right to hear them."

"Let us go and change," said the Murcian to Don Eugenio, very glad at not having assassinated him, but still regarding him with a hatred truly Moorish. "Your worship's apparel is suffocating me. I've been very wretched ever since I put it on."

"Because you don't understand it," replied the Corregidor. "I, on the contrary, am very desirous to resume it, in order to hang you, and half the world as well, if the explanations of my wife do not satisfy me."

His wife, who heard these words, tranquillised the company by a sweet smile, consonant to those guardian angels whose mission it is to protect mankind.

XXXIV.

“THE CORREGIDOR’S WIFE IS PRETTY, TOO.”

WHEN the Corregidor and Uncle Lucas had quitted the room, Doña Mercedes seated herself again on the sofa with Seña Frasquita by her side ; and, addressing the servants and officers who filled up the doorway, said with affable simplicity :

“Come, now, every one of you, say all the harm you know of me.”

Ten voices commenced to speak at once, but the nurse, as the most important person in the house, imposed silence on the rest, and spoke as follows :

“You must know, Seña Frasquita, that we, that is, my mistress and me, were looking after the children, hoping to see master come in, and telling our beads to pass away the time, for Garduña said that master’s absence arose from his being engaged in the pursuit of some terrible criminals, and we didn’t want to go to bed before we saw him return safe and sound, when we heard a noise of some one in the next room, where master’s and mistress’s bed is. We took the light, dead with fear, and went to see who was in the room, when, Holy Virgin ! on entering we saw a man dressed like my master (but it wasn’t him, because it was Frasquita’s husband) trying to hide himself under the bed. ‘Thieves !’ we began to cry as loud as ever we could, and a moment afterwards the room was full of people, and the constables pulled the pretended Corregidor from his hiding place.

“My lady, as well as the rest, recognised Uncle Lucas, and seeing him in that dress was afraid he had killed master,

and began to weep, enough to melt a stone. 'To prison! to prison!' said all present. 'Thief! Assassin!' were the best words Uncle Lucas heard. He leant against the wall without saying a word, and looked more like a corpse than himself; but when he saw they were going to carry him off to prison, he managed to say what I am going to repeat, although, indeed, it would be better to keep it secret. 'Señora, I am not a robber or an assassin; the robber and assassin of my honour is in my house in bed with my wife.'

"Poor Lucas!" sighed Señora Frasquita.

"And poor me!" murmured the Corregidor's wife tranquilly.

"That's what all of us said—'Poor Uncle Lucas and poor mistress!' For we knew before that master had fixed his eyes on you; and although none of us fancied that you——"

"Nurse!" exclaimed Doña Mercedes, severely. "Do not go on in that way!"

"I will continue in another," said a constable, profiting by this conjuncture to join in the conversation. "Uncle Lucas, who deceived us all with his dress and way of walking when he entered the house, so much so that every one of us took him for the Señor Corregidor, did not evidently come with very good intentions; and if my lady had not been sitting up—only fancy what would have happened!"

"Come! You hold your tongue," interrupted the Cook, "You are only talking nonsense. Yes, Señora Frasquita. Uncle Lucas, in order to explain his presence in mistress's room, had to confess his intentions. Mistress could not contain herself at hearing them, and gave him such a slap on his mouth, that half of his words were left in his throat. I myself covered him with insults, and would have liked to

scratch his eyes out. Because, you know, Señá Frasquita although he is your husband——”

“You are a garrulous old woman,” cried the porter, putting himself in front of the female orator. “What more would you have liked to do? In short, Señá Frasquita, hear me and let us come to the point. My lady did and said just what she ought; but then, as soon as her annoyance was over, she took compassion on Uncle Lucas, and uttered these or like words:—‘However infamous may have been your intentions, Uncle Lucas, and although I shall never be able to pardon your insolence,’ it is necessary that your wife and my husband may believe during some hours that they have been caught in their own nets, and that you, with the aid of your disguise, have returned affront for affront! No better vengeance can we take than this, and we shall easily explain the hoax when it becomes necessary to do so.’ Having hit upon this plan, the Señora and Uncle Lucas instructed us all what to do and to say, as soon as the Señor should return; and, for certain, I think I have given Garduña such a drubbing behind, that he won’t forget this night for a long while.”

While the porter was concluding his speech, the wife of the Corregidor and the Navarrese were occupied in whispering over what was being said, embracing and kissing one another, and occasionally breaking out into uncontrollable laughter.

It is a pity that what they said was not heard. But the reader can imagine the substance of it without great difficulty—at any rate, my lady readers can do so.

XXXV.

AN IMPERIAL DECREE.

THE Corregidor and Uncle Lucas returned to the room, each dressed in his own clothes.

"Now it is my turn," said the notable Don Eugenio de Zuñiga, as soon as he entered.

After striking the floor twice with his stick, as if to recover his energy, he said to his wife with emphasis and an indescribable coolness :

"Mercedes, I am awaiting your explanations."

At this moment, the miller's wife rose up and, as a sign of peace, gave her husband a pinch which made him wriggle, at the same time glancing at him with appeased and bewitching eyes.

The Corregidor, who observed this pantomime, stood all of a heap, unable to explain such an unaccountable reconciliation to himself. He again addressed his wife, and said in his bitterest tone :

"Señora, all have arranged matters except ourselves. Relieve me of the doubts I naturally entertain. I command you to do so, as your husband, and also as Corregidor." Saying this, he struck the floor again with his stick.

"Then you are going?" here observed Doña Mercedes, approaching Frasquita, and taking no notice of Don Eugenio. "Go free from all anxiety that this scandal will have any unpleasant consequences. Rose, light these good people, who say they are going. Good-bye, Uncle Lucas."

"No ! no !" cried De Zuñiga, interposing, "Uncle Lucas does not go. It is my orders that he shall remain in custody till I know the whole truth. Holloa ! officers here ! In the King's name !"

Not a single man obeyed. They all looked at the Corregidor's wife.

"Come, let the passage be free," added the latter, almost pushing against her husband as she passed by him to dismiss the assembled company in the most courtly fashion. She made them a gracious curtsy, which, however, was interrupted by her husband pulling her dress, and exclaiming inarticulately:

"But I—but you—but we—but those —" Useless trouble! No one paid the least attention to his worship.

When everybody had gone, and the husband and wife were alone, the latter at last deigned to say with the accent of a Czarina of all the Russias, when fulminating an order of perpetual banishment against a fallen minister:

"Were you to live a thousand years you should still remain ignorant of what has passed in my room. Had you been there, as you should have been, you would be under no necessity to ask. But as regards myself, there is not, and there never will be, any reason obliging me to satisfy you; for I despise you so much, that were you not the father of my children, I would throw you over that balcony, this very moment! Now, good night, sir."

After pronouncing these words, which Don Eugenio heard without moving an eyelid—for when alone with his wife he was meekness itself—she entered the inner room and passed thence into her own apartment, closing the doors behind her. The poor man remained standing in the same position, muttering these words between his gums (not between his teeth, for he had scarcely any left), and with an unparalleled cynicism:

"After all, I've escaped better than I thought I should. And Garduña shall now look out for another for me."

XXXVI.

CONCLUSION, MORAL AND EPILOGUE.

THE birds were chirping to salute the morn when Uncle Lucas and Señá Frasquita left the city and took the road to the mill. They were on foot. the two donkeys being in front of them.

"On Sunday you must go and confess," said the miller's wife to her husband. "You require to purify yourself from all your bad ideas and the criminal thoughts of last night."

"You are quite right," replied the miller. "But you must do me a favour, and give the pillows and sheets off our bed to the poor, and put on fresh ones. I cannot lie down where that poisonous vermin has sweated."

"Don't name him to me, Lucas!" replied Señá Frasquita. "Let us talk about anything else."

In due course they arrived at the mill, at an hour when, although the sun had not yet risen, it could be seen gilding the tops of the mountains.

In the afternoon, to the great surprise of the married couple, who expected no more visits from high personages after a scandal like that of the preceding night, there came to the mill more great folks than ever. The venerable Prelate, many Canons, the Jurisconsuls, two Priors, besides various other personages who had been summoned by his lordship the Bishop, occupied the larger portion of the court-yard. Only the Corregidor was missing.

As soon as the company were assembled, the Lord Bishop rose and made a short speech, in the course of which he said that, notwithstanding what had passed in that house, his

Canons and he should continue visiting it as before, in order that the honoured miller and his wife, as well as the remaining persons there present, should not be subjected to the public censure, which was deserved by him alone who, by his infamous conduct, had profaned a gathering so temperate and so innocent. He exhorted Señá Frasquita most paternally to be not quite so provocative and tempting in her looks and conversation in future, and to try and keep her arms covered and to wear her bodice cut higher. He advised Uncle Lucas to be less selfish, to be more circumspect, and less presumptuous in his dealings with his superiors; and concluded by blessing everyone and saying that as it was not a fast-day he would eat with much pleasure a couple of bunches of grapes.

All were of the same opinion as regards the last particular, and the vine trembled the whole afternoon. The miller estimated that nearly half a hundred weight of grapes was consumed.

These happy meetings continued for about three years until, contrary to the expectations of everybody, the armies of Napoleon entered Spain, and the War of Independence began.

The Lord Bishop, the Prebendary, and the Penitentiary died in the year 1808, and the Advocate and the remaining officials in the years immediately following; the cause of their deaths being inability to bear the sight of the Frenchmen, Poles, and Germans, who had invaded the country and smoked their pipes in the churches during the performance of mass.

The Corregidor, who never returned to the mill, was deprived of his post by a French Marshal, and died in the Court prison, to which he had been committed for having

refused (let it be said to his honour) to come, even for a single moment, to any compromise with the foreign domination.

Doña Mercedes did not marry again, and after carefully bringing up her children, withdrew, in her old age, to a convent, where she finished her days, esteemed as a saint by all who knew her.

Garduña became a Frenchman. Señor Juan Lopez formed a guerrilla band, which he commanded, and died, with Toñuelo his constable, in the famous battle of Alcaza, after killing many of the enemy.

Finally, Uncle Lucas and Señá Frasquita, although they remained childless, continued loving one another in their own way, and attained a very advanced age, seeing Absolutism disappear in 1812 and 1820 ; to re-appear in 1814 and 1823, until at last the Constitutional system was again established upon the death of the absolute King ; the happy pair passing to a better life (precisely at the beginning of the seven years of civil war) without the introduction of "pot" hats causing them to forget those good old times symbolized by the "Three-cornered Hat."

THE CORNET-A-PISTON

"DON BASILIO, give us a tune on the cornet, and then we can have a dance. It is nice and cool here under these trees."

"Yes, yes, Don Basilio, do give us a tune on the cornet."

"Fetch the cornet that Joaquin is learning to play on. Will you play to us, Don Basilio?"

"No."

"But why not?"

"Because I don't know how."

"Don't know how! Was there ever such humbug?"

"Ah! he wants to be pressed."

"Come, come, we know very well that you have been a leading musician in a regimental band."

"And that no one could play the cornet-à-piston like you."

"And that you played in the royal palace in the days of Espartero. Come, Don Basilio, have compassion on us."

"Well then, it is true, I have played on the cornet-à-piston. I have been, in fact, a master, a specialist as they now call it, on that instrument. But it is equally true that twelve years ago I gave my cornet away to a poor discharged

musician, and that since that time I have not played a single note."

"What a pity."

"But you will have to play this evening."

"Remember, grandpapa, that it is my birthday."

"Bravo! here is the cornet."

"Yes; what tune shall we have?"

"A valse."

"No; a polka."

"Polka! nonsense, a fandango."

"Yes, yes; a fandango, the national dance."

"I am very sorry, my dear children, but I cannot play."

"What! you who are so amiable?"

"And always so obliging."

"What! not when your grandchild begs you?"

"And your niece too?"

"Leave off, please, in heaven's name. I have told you that I cannot play."

"Why cannot you?"

"Because I do not remember how, and because I have also sworn never to try to learn again."

"To whom did you swear this?"

"To myself, to the dead, and to your poor mother, my child."

All the surrounding faces lengthened on hearing these words.

"Ah! if you only knew at what a cost I learned to play the cornet," added the old man.

"A story! a story!" exclaimed the young people. "Tell us the story."

"Well, yes," said Don Basilio; "it is a story. Listen, and you shall judge for yourselves whether I can or cannot play the cornet."

And seating himself under a tree, surrounded by eager and smiling young people, he told the story of his lessons in music.

It is seventeen years since, he began, that the civil war was raging in Spain. Don Carlos and Queen Isabella were contending for the crown, and the Spaniards, divided into two parties, spilt their blood in the fratricidal struggle.

I had a friend named Ramon Gamez, a lieutenant in the same rifle battalion as myself. We had been educated together, had quitted ~~school~~ together, fought side by side, and wished to die together for liberty. He was even a more ardent Liberal than I, or than any one else in the army.

But a certain injustice shown by our commander towards Ramon, one of those abuses of authority which disgust a man with the most honourable career, an act of tyranny in short, inspired the lieutenant with the desire to leave the ranks of his fellow-soldiers; and the friend prepared to abandon his friend, the Liberal to go over to the Carlists, while the subaltern was bent upon slaying his colonel. Ramon was not one to swallow insults, or to put up with injuries. Neither my threats nor prayers could divert him from his purpose. He had made up his mind. He would exchange his ~~friend's~~ shako for the Carlist cap, hating the Carlist cause though he did.

At that time we were in the Principality, about three leagues from the enemy's forces. It was the night on which Ramon was to desert, a cold, wet, gloomy night, the eve of a battle. At midnight he entered my quarters where I was asleep.

"Basilio," he murmured in my ear.

"Who is there?" I asked, starting up.

"It is I. Farewell!"

"You are going then?"

"Yes; adieu!" And, taking me by the hand, he continued, "Listen. If, as it is thought probable, there should be a battle to-morrow, and we should meet in it——"

"I know; we are friends."

"Good. We will first salute, and then retreat from one another. I shall probably fall to-morrow, for I mean to charge through everything till I can reach, and slay the colonel. As to yourself, Baggio, do not expose yourself. Glory is but smoke."

"And life naught without it, fever."

"You are right, win your major's epaulets," exclaimed Ramon; "the pay is not smoke, until one has scattered it. Alas! that is all over for me."

"What melancholy ideas," I said affectionately. "To-morrow we shall both survive the fight."

"Then let us appoint a meeting place after it."

"Where?"

"At the Hermitage of St. Nicholas at one in the morning. He who does not come will be amongst the dead. Is it agreed?"

"Agreed."

"Then farewell!"

"Farewell!"

And after an affectionate embrace Ramon vanished in the darkness of the night.

As we anticipated the Carlists attacked us on the following day. The action was a very sanguinary one, lasting from three in the afternoon till nightfall. At about five o'clock my battalion was rudely assailed by a body of troops led by Ramon, who wore the white Carlist cap and the uniform of a major. I gave orders for my men to open fire, and Ramon did the same as regards the troops under his command, and his force and my battalion were soon engaged hand to hand.

We were victors so far as this struggle was concerned, and Ramon had to fly with the scattered survivors of his forces, but not until he had with his own hand shot the man who the evening before was still his colonel, and who in vain sought to defend himself from his rage.

At six o'clock the engagement took an unfavourable turn for our army, and I and a portion of my company were cut off and obliged to surrender. I was led captive to the little town of S——, occupied by the Carlists since the commencement of the campaign, where I expected to be shot immediately.

II.

It struck one in the morning, the hour of my appointment with Ramon. I was locked in a cell of the town prison. I asked for news of my friend and was answered :

“He is a brave fellow. He killed one of your colonels. But he must have fallen during the latter part of the battle.”

“What makes you think so?” I enquired.

“Because he has not returned from the field, and the men under his command can give no news of him.”

Ah, how I suffered during that night. One hope remained to me, that Ramon had been waiting for me at the Hermitage of St. Nicholas, and for this reason had not returned to the Carlist camp.

“How grieved he will be on finding that I do not keep the tryst,” thought I. “He will believe me dead. And after all am I so very far from my last hour. The Carlists now shoot all their prisoners, the same as we do ourselves.”

At dawn of day a priest entered the prison where all my companions were asleep.

"Is it death?" I asked on perceiving him.

"Yes," he answered gently.

"Now?"

"No, within three hours' time."

The next moment I had awakened my companions, and yells, sobs and blasphemies resounded through the prison. Every man when about to die fixes on some one idea and clings to it firmly. Nightmare fever or madness, this is what happened to me. The thought of Ramon, of Ramon alive, of Ramon dead, of Ramon in heaven, of Ramon at the Hermitage, took possession of my brain in such fashion that I could think of nothing else during those hours of agony.

I took off my captain's uniform and put on a soldier's forage cap and great coat. In this guise I marched out to death with my nineteen companions in misfortune. One only had been reprieved through being a bandsman. The Carlists at this time spared the lives of all musicians on account of the great lack of them in their ranks.

"And were you a musician, Don Basilio? Was your life saved on that account?" enquired all the young people at once.

"No, my children," replied the veteran. "I was no musician."

The troops were formed on three sides of a square and we were placed on the fourth. I had drawn No. 11 that is to say, I was to die the eleventh. Then I thought of my wife and my daughter, of yourself and your mother, my child.

The volleys began. The sound of the shots drove me mad. As my eyes were bandaged I could not see my companions

fall, but I strove to count the volleys in order to know, just before my turn came, when my existence was about to end. After the third volley, however, I lost count.

Oh! those volleys will echo eternally in my heart and brain as they echoed that day. Now I thought they were a thousand miles away, now the balls seemed to whistle about my very head. Still they went on.

"Now for it," I thought, and the volley came, yet I was still alive.

"This must be it, I said at last.

But I suddenly felt myself seized by the shoulders, and shaken, whilst voices sounded in my ears. I fell, and lost all consciousness. I felt something akin to a deep sleep steal over me, and imagined that I had been shot to death. Then I fancied that I was stretched on a couch in my prison I could not see. I raised my hand to my eyes to remove the bandage, and found them uncovered, and wide open, dilated. Was I blind. No. The prison was in darkness.

I heard a bell ringing, and shuddered. It was ringing for service. "It is nine o'clock," I thought; "but of what day?" A shadow darker than the heavy gloom of the prison bent over me. It seemed to be a man. But the others—the other eighteen? They had all been shot, and I was either alive or in my tomb. My lips mechanically murmured a name, the name that had haunted me in my nightmare.

"Ramon."

"What is it?" answered the shadow by my side.

I shuddered. "Heavens!" I exclaimed, "am I in the other world?"

"No," answered the same voice.

"Ramon! Are you living?"

"Yes."

"And I?"

"You too are alive."

"But where am I? Is this the Hermitage of St. Nicholas? Was I not made prisoner? Can I have dreamt it all?"

"No, Basilio, you have not been dreaming. Listen. As you know, I killed the colonel yesterday in fair fight. I was avenged. Yet mad with rage I continued fighting even after nightfall, till there was not a soul left upon the battle field. When the moon rose I remembered you, and directed my steps towards the Hermitage of St. Nicholas, intending to await you there. It was ten o'clock. I had been under arms since one, and the night before I had not closed my eyes. I fell sound asleep. At one o'clock I woke up with a cry. I had dreamed that you were dead. I looked round, and found myself alone. What could have become of you? I heard the clocks strike two, three, four. What a night of agony! You did not come; you must surely be dead. Day broke, and I left the Hermitage, and came to this place in quest of the Carlist forces. I arrived shortly after sunrise. Every one thought I had been killed the day before, and on their seeing me I was embraced on all sides, and the general overwhelmed me with honours. I then learnt that a score of prisoners were to be shot, and a presentiment came over me. 'Can Basilio be one of them?' I said to myself, and ran to the place of execution, where the square was already formed. I heard shots. They had begun then. I strained my eyes, but could not see, for I was blinded by grief, dizzy with apprehension. At length I made you out when you were almost on the point of being shot. There were only two victims before your turn came. What was to be done? I went crazy; I gave a shout, clasped you in my arms, and cried out hoarsely and tremulously:

“ ‘Not this one ! Not this one ! general.’ ”

“The officer commanding the force recognized me, and the way in which I had fought the day before in his turn, and said :

“ ‘Why not ? Is he a musician ?’ ”

“That word was for me what the sight of the sun in all its splendour would be to an old man blind from birth. The light of hope flashed before my eyes so suddenly as to blind them.

“ ‘A musician !’ ” I exclaimed. ‘Yes, yes, general, he is a musician, a splendid musician !’ You meanwhile were stretched out senseless.

“ ‘What instrument does he play ?’ asked the general.

“ ‘The—the—ah !—yes—the cornet-à-piston.’ ”

“ ‘Do we want a cornet-à-piston ?’ enquired the general, turning towards the band.

“Five seconds—five centuries they were to me—passed before the bandmaster answered, ‘Yes, general, we do want one.’ ”

“ ‘Then take away this man, and go on with the execution,’ said the Carlist chief. I at once took you up in my arms, and carried you to this cell.”

III.

RAMON had hardly ceased speaking before I rose and said to him amidst tears and laughter, embracing him trembling, I know not how :

“I owe you my life.”

“Not so,” answered Ramon.

“What do you mean ?” I replied.

"Can you play the cornet?" he asked.

"No."

"Then you do not owe me your life; but I have imperilled mine without saving yours."

I turned as cold as ice.

"And as to music?" said Ramon. "Do you know anything of it?"

"A little, very little. You recollect what they taught us at school?"

"A little indeed, or rather nothing at all. You are doomed without hope, and I, too, shall be condemned as a traitor and a liar. For within a fortnight the band to which you are to be attached is to be organised."

"Within a fortnight?"

"Neither more nor less. And as you cannot play the cornet, since heaven will not accomplish a miracle, we shall both be shot."

"You—you shot!" I exclaimed, "and for me who owe my life to you. Ah! no; heaven will not suffer this. Within a fortnight I shall know music and play on the cornet-à-piston." Ramon burst out laughing.

What more would you have me tell you, my children. In a fortnight, such is the power of the human will, in fourteen days and fourteen nights, for I did not rest or sleep for that time, I learned to play the cornet. What days they were. Ramon and I went out into the open country, and passed hours and hours with a musician who came every day from a neighbouring town to give me a lesson.

Escape? I read that question in your eyes. Nothing more impossible. I was a prisoner, and a watch was kept on me, and Ramon would not escape without me. I did not talk, I did not think, I did not eat. I was mad, and my monomania was music, the cornet, the devilish cornet-à-piston. I wanted

to learn it, and I did. If I had been dumb I should have spoken, if I had been paralysed I should have walked, if I had been blind I should have seen. No, I willed it. Will makes up for everything. To will a thing is to do it. I willed it; that was everything. I willed it, and I succeeded. Children, learn this great truth.

I saved my life, but I went mad; and being mad, my madness took the form of art. For three years my cornet was never out of my hand. Its notes were my entire world during that time. My life was narrowed down to blowing upon the instrument.

Ramon did not abandon me. I made my way to France, and there I continued to play the cornet. It was part of myself, I spoke with it to my mouth. The cornet became everything under my fingers, swelled, became supple, groaned, wept, shrieked, implored, imitated birds, beasts, human wailings. My lungs were of iron. Audiences flocked to hear me; it was a wonder, a miracle.

Thus I lived for another two years. At the end of these my friend died, and at the sight of his corpse I recovered my reason. And, when in my senses, I took up a cornet one day, I found, to my astonishment, that I did not know how to play upon it.

Do you still want me, my children, to make music for you to dance to?

THE MARQUIS'S LAST FROLIC.

I.

"I AM certain," said the Marquis, lighting another cigar, "that if we were to look into the lives of all reformed rakes we should find that each of them lost his last battle, in other words, that his last frolic was a disappointment, a defeat, in fact."

"Marquis," said General X., "you evidently hold very strong views on this point, which makes me think that you are speaking from experience. You were very wild in your youth."

"Not more than is usual."

"And then suddenly you became a reformed character when you might have aspired to further conquests."

"I think so. I was not more than thirty when I gave up fast life and married Eloisa. I did not wait, like Charles the Fifth, to be eaten up with rheumatism before abandoning the field."

"Let us see about that; prove your own theory and relate to us the defeat that preceded your own retirement to the monastery of St. Just."

"Yes, yes, tell us all about it."

"As you please, gentlemen. I well remember the act that brought about my abdication."

• 'And was it indeed a disaster?' enquired the Duke.

"A horrible, or, rather I should say a providential one. But I must premise that it does not date, as you might suppose, from my marriage with Eloisa."

"Oh! we understand, it was anterior to it."

"Not so. It was subsequent. My cure was incomplete when I married, that is to say I was not a reformed rake when I led Eloisa to the altar, and if I married her it was for fear I should not meet with another woman of her virtues whom I could choose for the mother of my children. But it could still be said of me *Latet anguis in herba*, there is a snake in the grass. I was not yet reformed! I had not even made up my mind to become so. I had not yet undergone the defeat I have alluded to."

The Marquis slowly drew at his almost extinct cigar till it was well alight, sighed and went on:—

I had been married three years, and was at that time, as I have since continued to be, truly in love with my wife. I recognised all her good qualities, considered myself fortunate in having linked my lot to hers, and felt that matrimony undoubtedly had many advantages. Well, gentlemen, it was after three years of married life that I began to note a rakish feeling reviving in my heart. The phantom of the other, the strange woman, the forbidden fruit, began to beckon me across the calm horizon of my domestic happiness. I should like to free myself, I thought. I should like to vindicate my existence, and prove to myself that I am still capable of inspiring a tender passion. Within a short time of these atrocious thoughts occurring to me, it seemed as though fate, destiny, or if you will, luck, had ranged itself on my side, and offered me the opportunity of accomplishing that act of independence for which I was sighing. Give me all your attention, gentlemen, for the heroine of the drama is about to make her appearance.

II.

I WAS living with Eloisa in the country, in the neighbourhood of Bayonne, in one of the châteaux that abound there, and which are rented by visitors during the summer months. Ours stood on the road to Pau. At that time there were no railways in the South of France.

It was in this country residence that I first conceived in the abstract the wicked notion of solemnly deceiving my spouse, of risking an adventure, and, if successful, adding a fresh laurel to those of my stormy youth. Solitude, the native beauty of the country, and the sight of the bewitching summer visitors passing before our solitary dwelling in carriages bound for other parts of the Pyrennees, doubtless helped to influence me.

The country, and, above all, the country in France, so densely peopled with petticoated divinities, is a most terrible foe to matrimonial fidelity. Silk in the silence of the groves rustles in a way that gives one the vertigo.

Such being the state of things, you must know I made the discovery that there was living near us an old flame of mine, from Cadiz, whom I had once thought of marrying, and whose hand I had not asked solely because she had allowed me unresistingly to kiss it several times when proceeding homewards on my arm, in company with her widowed aunt and an old friend of the latter, from a certain never-to-be-forgotten ball to their dwelling; a dwelling, inside which I never managed to penetrate, not through want of good will on the part of the niece, but through excess of vigilance on that of the aunt. It is certain that my love passages with Antonia—for that was my charmer's name—would have

passed from the future to the perfect tense if I had devoted more time to them, or if the aunt had given us greater opportunities. This being the case, a man of my position could scarcely seek to make a woman, towards whom he entertained such views as those I have hinted at, his legitimate wife. For you must know that the genuine rake never marries his victims. He either marries a saint like my Marchioness or descends into the infernal depths.

As I was saying, I learnt that my old flame—recently married to a poor friend of mine of the predestined type, who had either not succeeded in kissing Antonia's hand before asking for it, or who was of a less apprehensive and cautious disposition than myself—was living at another lonely chalet, situate on the same road at a short league from our own. I no sooner became aware of this than I managed to meet her and her husband. They were both rejoiced at the circumstance, and at the fact of our being neighbours. I took my wife to the same village church that they went to, mutual introductions followed, visits were exchanged, we lunched one day at Antonia's, and she and her husband lunched on another at our house, and the four of us were the best friends in the world.

My poor Marchioness did not suspect anything, and matters could not have progressed more rapidly than they did. The league that intervened between the two chalets could be covered in less than half-an-hour either by our neighbours' dog-cart or by our saddle-horses, and as to the downward path, I may say that Antonia and I were following it at such a rate that we had almost reached the goal of our guilty journey.

On my first meeting I recognized that she still remembered the kisses I had imprinted on her hands in other days, and I further profited by the inattention of her husband and my

wife to add to these bygone and reverent kisses half-a-dozen on the left cheek, another half dozen on the right, and one masterly one on her perjured mouth, and all whilst walking in our garden or in hers, whilst her husband and my wife, with remorse I confess it, were talking about floriculture or relating how very happy Antonia and I respectively made them. What they never could manage was to follow the same paths as ourselves, such apparent eagerness did we display in chasing thistledown in lack of the butterflies of spring. For all this took place in the middle of September.

“On Sunday my husband is going to Pau, where he will stay three days. On Monday after dark, so as not to attract attention from any one, you can ride over to see me. I shall be in the garden, in the large summer-house, which you remember, stands like the one here at the end of the path leading from the gate and close to the greenhouse. I will take care that the gate is not locked, but only on the latch, and that the gardener shall be gone to the village on an errand that will occupy him some time. Consequently we can enjoy two or three hours of perfect liberty and without risk of interruption from any one.”

Thus did Antonia speak to me the morning that she lunched at our chalet with her husband. I could not do less than admire the consummate wisdom revealed by this well-planned scheme. “She is a veteran,” I mused to myself. “Someone has anticipated me.”

But however that might be, Antonia was in every way worthy of personifying my sinful illusions. Twenty-four years of age, of fair complexion, yet dark haired, with well rounded figure and graceful movements, calm, smiling, terrible, with the mouth of a child and the eyes of a very woman. “Eyes black and burning,” as Perico Alarcon has

described. Such was her outward appearance after twenty months of matrimony. She seemed a living statue of naughtiness.

III.

ON Monday evening I received a letter, which I had myself written in a carefully disguised hand, in which the mayor of the district in which our *châlet* was situated summoned me to appear before him at seven o'clock that night in order to speak to me of a serious matter affecting me personally, recommending at the same time the strictest secrecy, and telling me to come unaccompanied. The town was nearly a league off.

"It is a mistake, he has taken me for some one else," I thought of saying to my wife—when I came back.

But in the meanwhile I pretended great astonishment, some apprehension and much curiosity, and departed leaving my poor wife deeply affected, so affected that at one moment I thought she was about to faint, and I did not start till her heart had found relief in a flood of tears. You see that I do not gloss over any aggravating circumstance in connection with my iniquity. A forger, a liar, a brute, I was all these at once, besides being a traitor to faith sworn at the altar, and an assailant of the honour of a confiding friend. Five acts of infamy.

It was one of those snowy nights so frequent in the Pyrennees during eight months of the year. Nothing could be distinguished, absolutely nothing. I could hardly see beyond the end of my nose. But the road was straight, broad and level; there were trees and ditches to mark its borders, and my horse, a most intelligent brute, that had gone

several times from our chalet to that of Antonia, could hardly stray from the route. I therefore looked upon the snow as more advantageous than inconvenient. No one would see me on the way, thanks to it and to the darkness, and no one would recognize me when entering my neighbour's territory.

"Providence watches over lovers," I said to myself, cheerfully.

And how my heart beat! My old love passages with Antonia, those timid, veiled, and symbolic conversations suitable where a young lady is concerned, those hasty and unsatisfactory kisses imprinted on her maiden hands, those others, more daring but not less hasty, planted since on her cheeks and on her now schooled and grateful lips, her languishing looks during our recent interviews, above all during the last—all this constituted for my amorous hopes a world of illusions, promises, and unfailing happiness.

What a big debt I was about to receive payment of—a debt of five years' standing. And at what a trifling cost. How I rejoiced at not having married Antonia, but my sainted wife. What a happy lot was mine! I had an angel for my own wife, and my neighbour had certainly not one for his. How different would have been my situation if I had married her who was about to forget conjugal fidelity, and had afterwards fallen in love with that adorable object, incapable of evil, who was now my wife. Double mischance. I should have been loved by neither. The one out of wickedness and the other out of goodness would have equally maltreated me. And now the hearts of both were mine, both were striving to render me happy, and I was at the same time a lucky husband and a fortunate lover. I was still the cherished offspring of Love and the favoured grandchild of Venus.

* Such were my erroneous and detestable reflections when my

horse suddenly stumbled and fell. I got up, I should tell you, unhurt, miraculously unhurt when you consider that I had been shot clean over the horse's head. I searched about for my hat, a task of great difficulty amidst that perfect darkness, brushed myself down with my hands, and managed to get into the saddle again, though without repenting, for I was more impatient than ever to clasp that fair sinner in my arms—she whose promises had led me to leave my blessed wife, filled with sadness and grief in the solitude of a country house on such a dreadful night as this, counting the minutes and trembling every moment for my liberty and my life.

But this is what I think now, for then I could only think of Antonia's ardent eyes, her inviting lips, her satin skin, her arms which had grown more rounded since I gave her mine on leaving the evening parties of old, her waist no less slender than when I used to dance with her, and whispered soft nothings in her ear, her feet that I had pressed so often with my own when riding in company with her now dethroned aunt in a carriage to Carabanchel or the Alameda de Osuna.

So I again touched my horse with the spur, and at the end of a quarter of an hour his stretching out his head and neighing announced to me that we were near the paradise of my dreams. The noble animal had doubtless recognised the neighbourhood of the hospitable quarters in which he had been very well treated on two or three occasions.

"Thanks, good servant," I said, patting him with my hand. "So you, too, love this lucky spot."

The horse answered me by suddenly stopping, as if to say, "Here we are."

And indeed through the snow I could dimly perceive a luminous point, which I guessed was the lit-up window of the summer-house in which Antonia was awaiting me. I

dismounted, advanced to the edge of the road, and ran against the railings. My heart throbbed with joy, but the next moment a very natural fear assailed me.

"Suppose the gate is fastened. Suppose Antonia has repented of her invitation?" I asked myself with the causeless dread that assails any one keeping a first appointment of this kind.

I fastened my horse to one of the uprights of the railings and pushed in the dark till something seemed to give way. It was the gate opening. How fortunate, I thought, full of gratification at the foresight of the object of my adoration and at the facility afforded by the gate, which I interpreted as a favourable omen. At the same moment a white figure became apparent in the darkness, and a low voice, tremulous with emotion and surprise, but full at the same time of infinite sweetness, murmured "Juan, is it you?"

"It is I, my life!" I exclaimed, extending my arms. I felt two soft warm shoulders and heard a cry of pleasure, and a burning face, wet with tears, was pressed to mine, and the same soft voice, even more caressing now than at the outset, and less veiled, by anxiety, said between two affectionate kisses:

"Oh! Juan, I thought you were never coming home."

It was my wife. Yes, my wife. I was at my own home, in the garden of my own chalet, similar to that of Antonia and to all the other chalets. When I had fallen from my horse——

"I understand, I understand," interrupted the Duke. "The animal turned round, as horses always do in such cases, in an opposite direction to that which he had been following."

Exactly; and I from the shock of the fall and the movements I made in search of my hat quite lost count of it.

"And the horse preferred returning homeward to following up such an adventure," continued the Duke.

Whilst I being at the time a somewhat more unreasoning animal never thought that we might be going back.

"Well ; and then ?"

"Finish the story. What happened next ?"

Nothing. I have told you that I was at home with my wife clasped in my arms.

"But what did you do ? What did you say ?"

I led her to the summer-house in the garden, for that garden had also its summer-house, in which the poor thing had been watching for me, owing to its being nearer to the road than the *châlet*, and I never saw Antonia again, nor thought of any other woman than her who had embraced me with tears of joy at the very moment when I thought I was clasping her rival in my arms.

"Poor Antonia," said the Duke ; "what a night she must have passed."

For the rest, concluded the Marquis, throwing away the end of his cigar, do me the favour to consider the respect with which I afterwards regarded the horse that had brought me back into the paths of virtue. If I had been an Emperor like Caligula I would have made him, I will not say a consul, but a professor of morals. Being only a Marquis, I sold him almost immediately, feeling ashamed that an unreasoning brute should be more worthy than I of the blessings showered on me by my confiding spouse.

A FORTUNE TOLD.

I.

ON a certain day in August, in the year 1816, a ragged and odd-looking gipsy, of seventy, mounted upon a lean and raw-boned donkey, rode up to the door of the official residence of the Captain-General of Granada, and, dismounting, said, with the utmost coolness, that he wished to see that illustrious personage.

It is hardly necessary to remark that this desire successively aroused resistance on the part of the sentinel on duty, laughter amongst the orderlies, and doubt and hesitation amongst the aides-de-camp, before it came to the knowledge of his Excellency Señor Don Eugenio Porto-carrero, Count del Montijo, and at that epoch Captain-General of the ancient Kingdom of Granada. But as the said Captain-General was a very good-tempered individual, and had already taken some notice of the gipsy, whose name was Heredia, and who had acquired a certain notoriety by his jocular ways, his smart sayings, and his clever tricks, he gave orders for the visitor to be admitted.

The latter entered the study of his Excellency, taking one step backward for every two he made forward, as was his custom when matters looked ticklish, and, falling upon his knees, he exclaimed: "Blessed be the Holy Virgin, and blessed be your worship, the master of us all."

"Get up ; drop your flattery, and tell me what you want," answered the Count, dryly.

Heredia also became serious, and said, with some pertness, "Well, señor, I have come for the thousand reales."

"What thousand reales?"

"Those which you offered some time back by proclamation to whoever would bring you the description of Parron."

"What ! Have you his description, then?"

"Yes. I have sought him out, I have seen him, and can describe him, and I ask for the reward."

"Are you sure that you have seen him?" exclaimed the Captain-General, whose interest in the matter began to overcome his doubts.

The gipsy burst out laughing, and replied : "Your worship thinks that, like so many more, I am trying to deceive you. But may God never forgive me if I am lying. I saw Parron yesterday."

"But do you understand the importance of what you are saying? Do you know that for three years we have been hunting for this monster, this bloody-minded bandit, whom no one knows, and no one has ever been able to catch sight of and escape his clutches? Do you know that he robs wayfarers daily at various points in the mountains, and then kills them, because, as he says, the dead can tell no tales, and that this is the only way of keeping out of the hands of justice? Do you know, in short, that to meet Parron is to find yourself face to face with death?"

The gipsy burst out laughing again, and said : "And does not your worship know that what a gipsy cannot do no one on earth can. Can anyone tell when our laughter or our tears are real? Do you know any fox so full of tricks as we are? I repeat that I have not only seen Parron, but have spoken to him."

“Where?”

“On the Tozar road.”

“Prove it to me.”

“Listen, your worship. Yesterday week I and my donkey fell into the hands of some thieves. They bound me very tightly, and led me by some infernally rugged defiles to a little plateau where they had their camp. A cruel suspicion haunted me. ‘Are they Parron’s men?’ I kept asking myself every minute. If so, there is no getting out of it; they will kill me, for that devil has made up his mind that any eye that lights on his face shall see very few things more. I was occupied with these reflections when a richly dressed man stepped up to me, and, touching me on the shoulder and smiling pleasantly, said to me—

“‘Gossip, I am Parron.’

“To hear this and to fall flat were one and the same thing to me. The bandit burst out laughing. I got up on my knees, and exclaimed, in every tone of voice I could think of in turn—

“‘Blessed be your soul, King of Mankind! How was it that I did not recognize you by the princely bearing God has endowed you with! What would not a mother do to bear such children! Let me humbly embrace you, my son. May I die in an evil hour if you have not been lucky in coming across a gipsy to tell your fortune and kiss your royal hand. I am one of your own sort. Shall I teach you how to swop dead donkeys for live ones? Do you want to sell your old horses as colts? Would you like me to teach a mule French?’”

The Count del Montijo could not help laughing. Then he asked: “What did Parron say to all this? What did he do?”

“The same as your worship—laugh.”

“And yourself?”

"I, Señor? I laughed too, but the tears were running down my cheeks as big as oranges."

"Go on."

"Well, he then held out his hand to me and said: 'Gossip, you are the only clever fellow that ever fell into my power. All the others have the abominable habit of saddening me by weeping, complaining, and indulging in other tomfooleries that get my temper up. You alone have made me laugh, and if it were not for those tears——'

"'But, Señor, they are tears of joy.'

"'I will believe it. Devil knows it is the first time I have laughed for seven or eight years. It is true that neither have I wept. But let us make haste. Here, boys.'

"As Parron spoke I was surrounded by a number of levelled guns in the twinkling of an eye. 'Jesus shield me!' I began to cry.

"'Stop,' said Parron. 'Not just yet. I only called you to know what you took from this man?'

"'A donkey.'

"'And in money?'

"'Three duros and seven reales.'

"'All right. Leave us.' All drew back. 'Now tell me my fortune,' said the robber, holding out his hand to me.

"I took it, meditated a moment, recognised that the only thing to do was to speak according to the facts, and said, with the truth of my soul, 'Parron, sooner or later, whether you take my life or spare it, you will die on the scaffold.'

"'I know that,' answered the bandit, quietly. 'But tell me when.'

"I began to hesitate. This man, I thought, will spare my life; to-morrow I shall be in Granada and will describe him; the next day he will be caught. Then the trial will begin.

‘You wish to know when,’ I answered, aloud. ‘Well, it will be during next month.’

‘Parron shuddered, and so did I, knowing that my pride in my skill as a fortune-teller might, so to say, have cut my own throat.

“‘Harkee, gipsy,’ answered Parron, slowly. ‘You will remain in my power. If during next month I am not executed, I will hang you as surely as they hanged my father. But if I die within the time, you shall be free.’

“‘Many thanks,’ I said to myself. ‘He will forgive me after death.’ And I began to repent having given him such a short limit of time.

“Matters being so arranged, I was taken to a cave where I was shut up and Parron mounted his mare and rode off.”

“Ah! I understand,” exclaimed the Count del Montijo ; “Parron is dead, you have been set free, and this is how you are able to give his description.”

II.

“Quite the contrary, Señor ; Parron lives, and now comes the blackest part of my tale. A week went by without the captain coming to see me. From what I heard he had not reappeared at that spot since the evening on which I told him his fortune, a circumstance that was not at all uncommon, as I was informed by one of my guardians.

“‘You must know,’ he said to me, ‘that the captain visits hell from time to time, and does not come back till it suits him. The fact is, that we do not know what he does during his lengthy absences.’

“Meanwhile, by dint of entreaties, and as a return for having told the fortunes of all the band, prophesying to them

that they would not be executed, but would enjoy a calm old age, I had won them over to take me out of the cave of an evening and fasten me to a tree, for in my prison I was almost stifled by the heat. But there were always a couple of sentinels beside me.

“One evening, about six o'clock, the members of the band who had gone on scouting duty that day, in accordance with the orders of Parron's lieutenant, returned to the camp, bringing with them a poor harvester of about forty or fifty, whose lamentations pierced one's very heart.

“‘Give me back my twenty duros!’ he cried. ‘Ah! if you only knew with what toil I earned them. Reaping the whole summer under the blazing sun. A whole summer away from my home, my wife, and my children. That is how I scraped together, by a thousand toils and privations, this sum to keep us alive during the winter. And now, when I am almost home, eager to embrace them, and to pay the debts they must have incurred in order to get food during my absence, must I lose this money which is to me a veritable treasure? Pity, Señores. Give me back my twenty duros. Give me them back, for the sake of the blessed Virgin.’

“A laugh was the only reply to the poor father's appeals. I leant trembling with horror against the tree to which I was bound for we gipsies have families, too.

“‘Do not be a fool,’ said one of the bandits, at last, to the harvester. ‘You are wrong to think so much about your money when there are matters of more moment for you to occupy yourself with.’

“‘What do you mean?’ said the harvester, not understanding that there could be any worse mishap than for his children to be robbed of their bread.

“‘You are in the power of Parron.’

“‘Parron. I do not know him. I have never heard of him. I come from a long way off: I live at Alicante, and I have been harvesting at Seville.’

“‘Then, my friend, Parron means death. All who fall into our power must die. So make your will in two minutes, and recommend your soul to God in two more. Get ready. You have four minutes.’

“‘I will make use of them. Listen to me.’

“‘Well.’

“‘I have six children and an unhappy—widow—I will say, as I am about to die. I read in your eyes that you are worse than wild beasts. Yes, worse; for wild beasts do not prey upon their own kind. Ah! forgive me, I do not know what I am saying. Gentlemen, is any one of you a father? Is there not a father amongst you? Do you know what it is for six children to pass a winter without bread? Do you know what it is for a mother to see her little ones dying before her eyes of cold and hunger? Señores, I do not plead for my life, but for their sake. What is life to me? A series of toils and privations. But I must live for my children. Oh! my children, my children.’ And the poor father threw himself upon the ground, lifting towards the robbers a face of agony. He looked like one of the saints whom King Nero threw to the tigers.

“The bandits felt something stir within their breasts; then they looked at one another, and, recognizing that they were all thinking of the same thing, one of them ventured to say——”

“What did he say?” asked the Captain-General, deeply moved by this story.

“He said, ‘Gentlemen, what we are going to do will never be known by Parron.’

“‘Never, never,’ muttered the rest.

“‘Be off, my poor fellow,’ said one, who was almost in tears. I, too, made signs to the harvester to get away at once. The poor wretch got up slowly.

“‘Quick, be off,’ they all said, turning their backs on him. The harvester held out his hand mechanically. ‘Is not your life enough?’ cried one. ‘Go, go; do not stretch our patience.’ The poor father walked away weeping, and at length disappeared.

“Half an hour elapsed, spent by the robbers in swearing to one another not to say anything to their captain about having spared a man’s life, when suddenly Parron made his appearance with the harvester behind him on the crupper of his saddle. The robbers drew back, terrified.

“Parron alighted rapidly, unslung his double-barrelled gun, and, levelling it at his comrades, said: ‘Fools, wretches, I do not know why I do not kill you all. Quick. Give this man the twenty duros you robbed him of.’

“The thieves produced the twenty duros and gave them to the harvester, who threw himself at the feet of the individual who thus dominated even the bandits and who was so good-hearted. Parron said to him, ‘Go in peace; without your information I should never have found them. You see that you mistrusted me without cause. I have kept my promise. You have your twenty duros. So go.’

“The harvester embraced him several times and went away full of joy. But he had not taken fifty paces before his benefactor again called to him. The poor man hastened to turn back.

“‘What are your commands?’ he asked, wishing to be of service to him who had restored happiness to his family.

“‘Do you know Parron?’ said that personage.

“‘I do not.’

“‘You are mistaken,’ replied the robber; ‘I am Parron.’

"The harvester stood aghast. Parron raised his gun and fired both barrels at him and the man fell to the ground. 'Be accursed,' were the only words the bandit captain uttered.

"In the midst of the terror that almost blinded me I felt the tree to which I was fastened quiver slightly and my bonds slacken. One of the bullets, after wounding the harvester, had struck the rope binding me to the tree and had severed it. I concealed the fact that I was free and awaited a chance of escaping.

"Meanwhile, Parron said to his men, pointing to the harvester, 'Now you can plunder him. You are fools, rascals. The idea of letting this man loose to howl as he did all along the highways. If, instead of myself who met him and asked what was the matter, it had been the Miguelites, he would have described you and our camp as he did to me, and we should be all in prison by this time. You see the effects of robbing without killing. That will do for the present; so bury the body, lest it should stink us out.'

"Whilst the robbers were digging the grave, Parron sat down to eat with his back towards me. I worked by degrees away from the tree and plunged into the nearest ravine. It was night by this time. Covered by the darkness, I stole away as quickly as possible, and by the light of the stars caught sight of my donkey, which was quietly feeding, tied to a tree. I mounted it and did not stop till I reached here. So, Señor, give me the thousand reales and I will give you the description of Parron who still has my three duros and a half."

The gipsy gave a description of the robber, received the offered reward, and left the Captain-General's residence.

It remains to be seen, whether or not Heredia had really predicted Parron's fate when he told his fortune.

III.

A fortnight after the scene just described and at nine o'clock in the morning a number of idlers were gathered in the Calle de San Juan de Dios and the Calle San Felipe to view the muster of two companies of Miguelites who were to start at half-past nine in search of Parron, whose lurking place, together with his description and that of his band of evil-doers, had been verified by the Count del Montijo.

The interest and excitement of the on-lookers were intense when the Miguelites gravely took leave of their families and friends before marching on so important an enterprise, such dread had Parron managed to inspire throughout the ancient Kingdom of Granada.

"It is time to fall in," said a Miguelite to one of his comrades, "and I do not see Corporal Lopez."

"That is strange, for he is always the first when it is a question of going in search of Parron, whom he hates with all his five senses."

"Do you not know, then, what has happened?" said a third, joining in the conversation.

"Hallo! Here's our new comrade. How do you like our corps?"

"Very well, indeed," replied the new-comer, a pale individual with a distinguished bearing with which his common soldier's uniform scarcely harmonized.

"You were saying——?" remarked the first speaker.

"Ah! yes, that Corporal Lopez is dead," observed the other.

"Impossible! Manuel. I saw Lopez this morning as I see you now."

Manuel, for such was the pale Miguelite's name, answered, coldly: "Half an hour ago he was killed by Parron."

"By Parron! Where?"

„Here, in Granada. His body was found in the Cuesta del Perro.” All remained silent, and Manuel began to whistle the air of a patriotic song.

“That makes eleven Miguelites in six days,” said a sergeant. “Parron must be bent upon exterminating us. But how can he be in Granada? Are we not going to seek him in the Sierra de Lojo?”

Manuel left off whistling, and said, with his wonted indifference: “An old woman who witnessed the crime mentioned that after he had killed Lopez, he said if we went to seek him we should have the pleasure of meeting him.”

“Comrade, you are a wonderfully cool hand to speak of Parron so contemptuously.”

“Is Parron more than mortal?” asked Manuel, haughtily.

“Fall in,” exclaimed several voices at this juncture. The two companies fell in, and the roll-call began.

At that moment the gipsy Heredia happened to pass by and halted, like everyone else, to look at the soldiers. It was noticed that Manuel, the new Miguelite, shuddered a little, and drew back as though to hide behind his companions. At the same time Heredia fixed his eyes on him, and, with a yell and a bound as if a viper had bitten him, began to run in the direction of the Calle de San Jeronimo. Manuel raised his carbine and took aim at the gipsy, but another Miguelite struck up the weapon in time, and the shot went off in the air.

“He is mad.” “Manuel has gone mad.” “One of the Miguelites has gone out of his mind,” exclaimed the many spectators of the scene. And officers, sergeants, and peasants at once surrounded the man who strove to fight his way through, and who, after being restrained by main force, was overwhelmed with questions, recriminations, and sarcastic remarks, which, however, could draw no kind of reply from him.

Meanwhile, Heredia had been stopped by some passers-by, who, seeing him running away after a shot had been fired, imagined him to be an escaped criminal.

"Take me to the Captain-General," said the gipsy. "I must speak to the Count del Montijo."

"The Count del Montijo, indeed!" replied his captors. "Here are the Miguelites, and they will settle what is to be done with you."

"Very well," answered Heredia. "But take care that Parron does not kill me."

"Parron! What are you talking about?"

"Come on, and you will see."

So saying, the gipsy let himself be led before the leader of the Miguelites; and, then, pointing to Manuel, said, "Major, that is Parron, and I am the gipsy who gave his description to the Count del Montijo a fortnight ago."

"Parron! This prisoner Parron! A Miguelite Parron!" cried several of those around.

"There can be no doubt of it," said the Major, after reading the description furnished to him by the Captain-General. "We must have been blind. But who would have dreamt of looking for the bandit chief amongst the Miguelites sent out to capture him?"

"So it's all over with me!" exclaimed Parron, gazing at the gipsy with the look of a wounded lion. "That is the only man whose life I ever spared. I deserve what has befallen me."

The ensuing week Parron was executed, and thus the gipsy's prophecy was literally fulfilled.

